

AN

EFFECTUAL REMEDY

TO THE

DISPUTES PRESENTLY EXISTING

IN THE

ASSOCIATE SYNOD,

RESPECTING THE

F O R M U L A

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS

TO THE

REVEREND MR. LAWSON,

FROM

WILLIAM TAYLOR,

MINISTER OF THE ASSOCIATE CONGREGATION OF LEVERSIDE.

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THESE *Letters* are the result of Observations made upon Mr. Lawfon's Considerations, a short time after their publication; with very little intention ever to submit them to public inspection. Matters, however, coming evidently to a more serious crisis, than was then apprehended, the Author feels it his duty, by stating his views of the tendency of present measures, to manifest at least good will to prevent an event; which he conceives to be peculiarly detrimental, to the interests of religion. With what success the attempt hath been made, it is left with the impartial Reader to determine.

Conscious that the side he takes is by no means popular, according to the present current of what is called Liberal Sentiment, he is far from entertaining any flattering hopes of general approbation. Nay more, he is prepared to encounter frown, and reproach, for what appears to him 'the word of Christ's patience.' The sentiments he hath suggested are the result of the fullest conviction of what he conceives to be 'the truth as it is in Jesus;' and now he presents them to the public, accompanied with this earnest request, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, not the preconceived and speculative notions of men, be the rule, according to which they judge, both of the cause he espouses, and of the statement he hath given, in its vindication.

in a vastation.

LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO THE

REV. MR. LAWSON.

REVEREND SIR,

THE present correspondence is far from being an agreeable one to me. I enter upon it with the greatest reluctance; well aware of the mischievous consequences of religious controversy between brethren, professing to walk together, in the same church fellowship: For, whatever side shall gain the victory, the unavoidable calamities of the struggle must be felt by all.

You will doubtless recollect, that, among other wise regulations by the ancient Romans, they decreed no triumphs to their Generals, who conquered in civil wars. The moral is obvious; and by it these Heathen senators present a Christian Synod, with a great lesson of wisdom. Contests, in a religious society, are causes of mourning to all concerned. Even success may make the conqueror sad, and join with the vanquished, in deploring the calamities produced by the conflict. As happened to the conquering tribes at the conclusion of the exterminating war with Benjamin, instead of rejoicing, the gaining party, in a religious controversy, among brethren in the same fellowship, may well sit down, and weep over the disasters which have given them the mastery.—These remarks apply, alas! with too much propriety to our Associated Synod, with reference to the melancholy contest, which hath agitated and distracted its councils, since the time Mr. Frazer's petition was taken up for discussion.

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I never can think of that unhappy business, but with much pain and heaviness of spirit: nor cease from reflecting exceedingly, upon the rashness of Fathers and Brethren for attempting such a measure; by which they have disturbed the peace and harmony of a most loving and prospering part of the Church of Christ; have disturbed the fellowship, and greatly marred the comfort and edification of the Christian people; have excited a most unfavourable alarm, and given too much occasion for enemies to triumph. What a pity, the cost was not duly counted, before such movements were suggested! and particularly, that men have not been at all due pains, to satisfy themselves, that the articles of our profession were according to the word of God, before they came under engagements, to walk in *unity* with this part of the Church, and manifest a zealous activity in promoting the ends of our religious association!

But what astonishes me most of all, is, that, after our peace and harmony have been so much lost, by your scheme of alteration, and we are in such jeopardy of being shattered to pieces;—after the darling object was of necessity abandoned, and every trial made, without success, to satisfy the minds of scruplers, in consistency with what we profess, till it be proved to be wrong,—you and your brethren do not frankly and openly acknowledge, that the ends of edification do not warrant you to carry matters any farther; and that, for the peace and welfare of the body, you retain the formula as it was, and take such other steps as are necessary, to restore the confidence which is so much lost. Till this be done, I despair of peace in our society; and the sooner it is done, so much better.

Had the Synod, in April 1798, listened to petitions, from different sessions, to take your Considerations, and Mr. Dick's Sermon under review; and given such a deliverance, as to vindicate, and maintain, the due operation of that scriptural principle; *that no member of the church is at liberty, to assert, teach, or publish any thing contrary to her profession*, perhaps I had never troubled you with these letters. The maintenance of this principle appears of such importance to your present correspondent, as to be indispensably necessary, to the preservation of purity and consistency, in the profession of the church of God.

The very strong measure, however, by the Presbytery



of Dunfermline* in rejecting the petition of the session of Orwel, because that session stated some of the objections,

* The history of the case here alluded to, is shortly this. The Session of Orwel, justly offended at Mr. Lawton's Considerations, and Mr. Dick's Synod Sermon, agreed to petition the Synod, to review these publications, and give some deliverance upon them. Lest it might be objected, that the petitioners had specified no part of these publications to which their petition referred, as causes of complaint, the Session, by way of remark, introduced into the body of their petition, some very sensible and pointed strictures upon these performances. The Presbytery of Dunfermline, to whom this petition was presented for transmission unto the Synod, refused, upon hearing it, to transmit; because, said they, these remarks contain such personalities against two of our brethren, as we cannot allow to pass. Against this sentence the Commissioners, from that Session, protested and appealed to the Synod, and the Synod affirmed the sentence of the Presbytery.

Perhaps, all circumstances considered, it is not much to be wondered, although the Presbytery of Dunfermline adopted such a strong measure, to protect these authors; only, to have been consistent, they ought to have censured the Session of Orwel for calumny. But the pity is, that the Synod should have sanctioned the Presbytery's conduct. The petition was to the Synod, and therefore, it is humbly apprehended, the Presbytery had nothing to do with the merits of the cause, except, in so far as respected any informality, with reference to transmission.

If there were improper things in the petition, when it came before the Synod for judgment, the members of the Presbytery of Dunfermline, as members of court, had then full opportunity, and were in their proper place, to state every objection they thought proper to make. But to commence judges, of a cause that never came before them for judgment, and refuse to transmit, because the petition was carrying up to the Synod, a business which they did not like, is, perhaps, the boldest thrust, at the rights of petitioning, and the privileges of the Christian people, ever made in the Secession.

But the design was very obvious, as indeed a member acknowledged, when parties were pleading, before the Synod, upon that cause. They had been very much vexed, with petitions, from sessions and congregations of late, by which they had found themselves under the necessity of abandoning a very favourite scheme. They would therefore try the patience of the people, whether they could prevent such uneasiness in future, by shutting up, as far as they could, the access of sessions and congregations, by petition, to the supreme court.—A privilege which sessions and congregations, it is sincerely hoped, will not very easily suffer to be taken from them.

Whenever such attempts are made, to withhold redress of grievances, and stifle investigation, it hath always impressed my mind very unfavourably, with respect to any cause. Truth is an undisguised thing. It courts investigation. But whenever the advocates, for *free enquiry*, shrink, in any cause, from enquiry, it is a sure sign, to me at least, all is not right. If Messrs. Lawton and Dick had done no wrong, investigation would have done them no wrong either, but singular advantage and honour. It would have rescued their character, from public odium, at least among their own connections. And if they had done wrong, why not, both for their sakes, and the sake of good order and edification, listen to such an application, to call them to an account?

it had to these publications by way of remark, in order to enforce their request; and the sentence of Synod, affirming the deed of Presbytery, with the neglect experienced, by several other petitions, to the same effect, have made it manifest, that no redress is to be had, from that constitutional application.

The only alternative, then, that now remains, is either to allow the very *unscriptural* sentiments, as I reckon not a few of them in your Considerations, to circulate among the people, as if they were quite unanswerable, and so ferment like so much four leaven; or try to vindicate truth, by way of reply, in opposition to many things you have advanced, in that publication.

Whither the cause of truth, and the credit of the Secession, would have sustained any injury, although your Considerations had never seen the light, I am not at present to determine; although you will easily guess what that determination would be. Nor will I say, that you would mislead the public by design. But one thing is certain, such a view of our most unhappy dispute, is given in that pamphlet, as is calculated to mislead the reader; both respecting the proper state of the question, and the conduct and views of those members of Synod, who have resisted and will resist, the proposed alterations you patronize. Neither can I help thinking, that you have cast a most unjust odium, upon the principles hitherto professed by us as a religious body; and furnished our adversaries, with weapons which they always wished to possess; but never could obtain, till our Professor of Divinity, with a mistaken generosity, forged them in his fancy, and made them the present.

I can say, from personal knowledge, that the effects of which I now complain, have been produced, both in this and in other parts of the country. By not a few, who are much attached to our profession, as a religious body, but are not aware, of the tendency of the smooth proposals of alteration, which you recommend, the opposition which hath been made to them in the Synod, hath been considered as very unreasonable. Nay, a zeal for the headship of Jesus Christ our Lord, in opposition to all encroachments upon it, by civil rulers, has drawn away others; although our ancestors, whom you blame so much, encountered all the opposition and persecution they had to encounter, in

defence of that very article. Never were men so jealous of encroachments upon the royal prerogatives of the King of Zion, as these very confessors and martyrs were.

By others again, the members of Synod, who cannot see it their duty, to go into your views, have been much blamed for being so long silent, in publishing a vindication, both of truth, and of themselves. On these and other accounts, after long hesitation and much reluctance, I have, at length, taken the liberty of addressing you, in this public manner, and trust, your candour, good sense, and religion, will bear with me, while I try, with as much temper as I can, to state any thing I am able to say upon the subject, by way of remark, upon your publication.

In the progress of your Considerations, you say, "it can be no mark of disrespect for our pious ancestors to speak of them, as men, liable to err, and to state their mistakes:" and so say I. "Was Paul," you ask, "disrespectful, in his behaviour to Peter, because he found fault with him at Antioch, and recorded his reprehensible behaviour, in one of his Epistles?"

Neither you then, I hope, nor any of your friends, will reckon me disrespectful in my behaviour, even to our Professor of Divinity, although I state to you, with much honesty, what appears to me, reprehensible behaviour in you, respecting this business; although the office, I assure you, be far from being pleasant.

To allude to your own expression, respecting our pious ancestors, as you very properly style them, "even the most bigotted of your admirers, will be forced to confess, that, in some things you have erred," respecting the part you have taken, in commencing author, in this affair. Of all the members of Synod, allow me to say it, you should have been the last to have taken up the pen in such a case.

Had there been nothing else, Sir, the very principle of equity, and *freedom of enquiry*, for which you are such a zealous advocate, forbade you. Who knows not, the strong attachment of students of Divinity, to their instructor, and of consequence, the influence which his peculiar views may have upon their minds? To publish, therefore, in such an open manner, your dissatisfaction with what we profess, and say such strong things respecting young men, hath not only disgusted many in the community, but must have its influence, in prepossessing their minds against these articles, and in favour of notions, con-

trary to the profession of those very people, whom they are afterwards to instruct. Thus a stumbling block, although you by no means design it, is thrown in the way of their future edification, and comfort with one another.

When you were called to our Divinity chair, you certainly became the official guardian, of every part, of the profession, of this church. Our confidence was, that you would teach it with fidelity, to the youth who were afterwards, to fill our pulpits, and defend it with firmness. That, if in any thing, you discovered among them, a tendency to sentiments and principles, contrary to what we profess, you would give this timely check; and if persisted in, report to the courts, that they might support you. These, certainly, were offices of fidelity, which the high trust reposed in you, rendered indispensable. And if the change of principle happened with yourself, ought you not, at least, to have advised us of the change when it happened, and offered your resignation, with this as the reason of it?

But, to change your religious principles yourself, without reporting the change to the courts, who called you, to be the instructor of their youth;—to know that they also were adopting notions which you design only “plausible,” and these notions, in opposition to what they would, one day, have to declare, to be the confession of their faith;—aye, and to allow the matter to proceed so far, that nine out of ten of our youth, according to your own account, are of this description, without ever apprizing us, long before this time, of the growing evil,—what can we, what can your friends, what can a discerning public think of such a neglect? Is this, Sir, of a piece with that candour, and zeal, and regard to your trust, which might have been expected of you? To this neglect, I cannot help thinking, a great deal of our present trouble, is to be ascribed. Did I choose to speak so strongly as I feel, I would say, by such neglect or secrecy, the cause, hitherto professed by us, hath surely been betrayed.

Whether any of your friends, as zealous for a change, as yourself, might indulge the hope, that the respectability, of our Professor of Divinity, would break the opposition, were he to commence exhorter to the community at large, and so solicited you, to step forward, you and they best know. If this was the attempt, and their expectations, in making it; in this as in other measures, in this most un-

happy business, they have been mistaken. The part you have acted, has brought down a prodigious torrent of odium upon you; has greatly marred your usefulness as Professor; and lost you the confidence of the community, to such a degree, that——

Alterations in church-fellowship, commonly lead to such serious consequences, that nothing, but the most clear, and positive decisions of the Holy Ghost in their favour, can warrant the change. These ought to be presented to the church, in her councils, in the most regular and deliberate manner; and at a period, when the public mind is least disturbed; to prevent every thing like bias to one side, and give every opportunity to grave, and mature investigation; that all concerned may be convinced, and satisfied. The *consequences*, too, of such proposed changes, ought to be fairly and explicitly stated; and the limits accurately marked out, how far they are to be carried; that no catch, nor undue advantage may be taken, by flattering a community, into new things, ere ever they are aware, and involving them in consequences, which they did not foresee.

In this light, I have for a long time past, viewed our late attempts, toward change, in our Associated Synod, and the want of such a candid apprizal, in your Considerations, is, to me, a most capital defect. Loose as your reasoning appears, from beginning to end of them, they are written with much art and great plausibility. In your progress, you assert many precious truths, and say some very strong things, expressive of your zeal for truth; and, am firmly persuaded, that, according to your views, you are in earnest. There is, besides, in many places, much appearance of moderation and frankness; with which a reader, who knows no more of the business than you tell him, is sure to be taken. The air of solemnity, too, with which you treat the subject in several parts, is also calculated, greatly to please. And, indeed, the whole discussion is moulded into such a shape, as insensibly to reconcile the reader, to the change proposed; and make him wonder, how any could be so stiff as to oppose it: and all this, because he is not apprized, of the mischievous consequences which the change involves.

What logicians call, begging the question, appears, to me, an error, which runs through the whole of your per-

formance; and, therefore, however much you say, you prove nothing. You take, as granted, the very thing you ought to prove; and reason upon principles, which those, who differ from you, positively deny. You proceed, upon the supposition, that there are some very material defects, in our profession. But surely, if you were resolved to risk a publication of your views, to prove this, was the very first thing you ought to have attempted.

We, on the contrary insist, that every thing we profess, and became bound, at ordination, to maintain, be held, as agreeable unto the word of God, and founded upon it, till in a regular, and judicial manner, some part of it be proved to be erroneous. No man is to be condemned, as guilty, because one, or two, or even more, venture to defame him. Nay, even when accused, before his judge, he is not to be condemned, because an evil report is gone forth against him, till, by a regular process, the charge be established by proof. And will you be less candid, and impartial, to what you have hitherto professed, as the articles of your belief? Will you either take up, or propagate an ill report against them, and condemn them, upon the footing of it, without bringing them to a fair trial?

You, indeed, represent the opposers, of the overture, for forbearance, as averse to all investigation; as adhering to certain articles, because they have them, without examining, whether they be right or wrong. And, for such a degree of mulish obstinacy, you belabour us most sweetly, in several places of your performance. But have you forgotten, Sir, the transactions of the Committee, that prepared the overture? You and your friends, you ought to have recollected, were most decidedly against all investigation; but urged forbearance, and carried it, as the previous question. Those who resisted forbearance, as any remedy, pled for an investigation, in order to ascertain, what part, of our standards, was contrary to the word of God, and have them corrected accordingly; but, in this fair proposal, you out-voted us.* Had you recollected this

* In proof of the above, I present the reader with an extract of the Committee's Minute.

Bristol Session-house, 20th Oct. 1795.

"Agreed to consider the formula question by question.—The second question being read, &c. it was objected to the first part of said question as requiring an approbation of the whole doctrine of the confession, because said

single circumstance, when you composed your Considerations, I should imagine, that, at least, one half of your writing might have been spared. As, therefore, both you and I are bound, to sustain every article in our profession, as truth, till it be proved to be an error, and to defend it too, it is upon this principle I mean to proceed in my subsequent remarks.

This, Sir, hath been a most melancholy and dishonourable contest, as far as it hath gone; and what the end of it shall be, God only knows. We have surely much reason to be afflicted, to mourn and weep, before the Lord our God, because we have sinned, and, in righteous judgment, he is severely correcting us. Like Israel of old, for the divisions of Reuben, there ought to be great searchings of heart among us: neither have any of us just reason to put the blame, in this respect, away from ourselves. Every minister and elder, every congregation and family, and individual, have had the share in the provocation; and all of us are bearing our share in the suffering.

It is surely more than time to abandon an attempt, which hath hitherto been productive of so much mischief and grief: to retain the formula as it was; to restore confidence between the ministers and people, by a declaration of our attachment to what we profess; and suffer all strife to subside. And, indeed, Sir, although you had succeeded in your measure to your most sanguine wish, it would have been an extremely doubtful, and very hazardous experiment, to say the best of it which can be said; and where it would have landed you, at length, it is hard to say. But, amidst all the uncertainties in which we have been involved, in

confession gives greater power to the civil magistrate in matters of religion, than to many seems agreeable to the word of God. The same objection was also made to the matter of our covenants. After long reasoning, it was moved, that said doctrine of our confession, respecting the magistrate's power, and of our covenants, be made a matter of forbearance. Accordingly a vote was stated, that the above objection be made a matter of forbearance. A second state was put, proceed to explain, without voting forbearance. A previous vote was then put, whether the first or second state of the vote be adopted. The roll being called, and votes marked, it carried, that the first state of the vote should be adopted." After this we had it marked as our "opinion, that the Committee ought to have proceeded to explain."—Let the unprejudiced public judge from this, who are the truest friends to freedom of inquiry. We wished to retain no error in our profession, any more than they: only we wanted the error ascertained, that it might be removed. But the majority of Committee had another object in view, as I hope to be able to prove, by and by.

this business, of one thing we are sure, that more hurt has been done to this part of the church of Christ, and to the cause of religion, for these four years past, than, humanly speaking, we have a chance to do good for ten years to come, although our labours were accompanied with very considerable success; and how far your friends and you, who have introduced and pressed this matter, are to be blamed, as the cause, the day is coming when the Judge of all will determine.

In my next, I shall examine your state of the question, with the new scheme of fellowship you so warmly recommend, and the texts you adduce in it's support. Mean time,

I am, &c.

WM. TAYLOR.

LETTER II.

REVEREND SIR,

THE terms "charity, forbearance, moderation, peace," are very amiable sounds; and the things expressed by them, when properly explained, can never be sufficiently esteemed, or too much cultivated." Only, as they are commonly employed at present, in a sense very different from their signification in the holy Scriptures, you might have favoured us with the precise sense, in which you understand them, since they are evidently employed by you as a protection to you and your brethren, in your strenuous endeavours to introduce the changes you propose. For you certainly know that those men, "who adopt the most selfish, partial, loose, and ungenerous scheme of religion, assume the character of the only catholic, charitable and liberal hearted Christians," and blame all, as destitute of such qualities, who expose the unscriptural nature, and mischievous tendency of such a scheme.

Dr. Mosheim, describing, if I mistake not, the conduct of the Socinians, in propagating their errors, under the banner of great moderation, makes a general remark to this purpose; that charity, moderation, peace, are usually the common topics of those, whose sentiments differ from the church to which they belong, and *who want to introduce changes according to their views.*

Nothing is more remote from my intention, by this allusion, than to put you, or any of our brethren, in your views, upon a level with Socinians, or to impute to you their abominations: only, in the predicament in which you stand, with your new opinions, it is necessary you be very

accurate in defining these terms, that we be under no temptation to wonder, why, for sometime before, and since these changes were proposed, certain brethren should have been so frequent, and so fluent, in pressing upon us terms so greatly misapplied. For really, Sir, in proportion as people grow warm with a certain kind of charity, lenity and forbearance, so do they become cold and indifferent to truth and consistency: and their moderation soon degenerates into a connivance with error, and a tendency to tolerate the evil works of men. Hence then the indispensable necessity of defining these terms, in your use of them, circumstanced as matters at present are, in our unhappy misunderstandings.

The charity which "rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth," will never render us indifferent to any truth which God hath revealed to our faith, nor dispose us to consent to any measure, which would be apprehended, in its tendency, to throw any truth into the shade. In this case we are not to give place to a brother, even for a moment. Taking charity in this light, I heartily concur with you, that, "*of all the truths for which we ought earnestly to contend, none is more certainly divine, none is more deeply imprinted in the heart of the true follower of Jesus than this, that 'we ought to love one another even as Christ loved us.'*" But Christ loved us, not in adapting his gospel to our weaknesses, and infirmities, and prejudices, and errors; but in making the most compleat provision for the mortification of these evils, and for preventing them from obtaining the least shadow of indulgence, in the fellowship of his church.

As to your observation in the second page, that "our corrupt passions too readily dispose us to *judge hastily*, concerning our opponents," with your leave I will present you with what appears to me pretty striking proofs of the truth of it. "There are other truths which ought not to have place among our terms of communion, unless we wish to exclude from religious fellowship, all who have not the *same measure of understanding, or the same measure of pride with ourselves.*" "Every man," says Luther, "hath a pope in his own bosom. What will it profit us to be freed from his tyranny, if we are *popes to one another?*" "A blind deference for fathers is the folly of bigots, in either side." "We may be compelled to say things which

we are unwilling to say, *by those very men who find fault with us for saying them,*" &c. &c. Examples these the more in point, as they are your own!

You observe very properly, page 2d. that, "in religious controversies, it is necessary to attend to the state of the question, in the whole management of the debate." Yes, Sir: and much depends upon both sides agreeing to the state of the question. I heartily wish, if you were resolved to commence author in the business, you had paid a little more attention to this very matter. Much of the offence you have given, might, perhaps, by such an attention, have been avoided, as well as much of the mischief.

"The true state of the question," you say, "between those who urge, and those who oppose an alteration in the formula of the Associate Synod, is not, whether the Magistrate has any power in religious matters? or whether he has all that power which is ascribed to him in our public standards? but, whether the doctrine concerning his power in religious matters, as it is asserted in them, be a matter of so great importance in our religion that all ministers and elders in the Secession, should be required to profess their belief of it?—Not, whether our national covenants bind the nation through every generation? but whether none shall be admitted to minister among us in holy things, or to occupy a place in any Session, unless they can declare, in the presence of God and the people, that the present generation is bound, not only to hold fast the principles of religion sworn to in our covenants, but to hold them fast on this very account, that they were sworn to by our forefathers; so that we must be guilty of perjury as well as of apostacy, unless we cleave to that profession of religion which the swearers of the covenants bound themselves to maintain."—But, Sir, you could not but know, that we had many objections to such a state of the question; and till these were removed, you could not take up such a discussion, with any probability of reaching conviction to us. The state you propose might promise to strengthen your side, by bringing people into your views, who had not all the information that was necessary, to open their eyes to the tendency of your scheme. But surely the interests of truth, the credit of our confession, and the maintenance of union in our fellowship, required, that the point be ascertained from the word of God, how far these articles in question were agree-

able unto these unerring records, and founded upon them,

Besides, before one in your circumstances could propose such a state of the question, I should have thought some previous *considerations* indispensably necessary. Such as, how far your station as Professor of Divinity, warranted you to enter into such a controversy at all?—How far you were warranted by your vows at ordination, which bound you to maintain, assert, and defend, the very articles you call unimportant, against all contrary errors and opinions, certainly until they be regularly found upon judicial investigation, to be contrary to the word of God?—How far the scriptural basis* of all ecclesiastical association, with the re-

* *Scriptural basis of all ecclesiastical association.* This appears to me a most material consideration, in this controversy. Can any thing be more clear from the word of God, than that no public instructor, office-bearer, or member of the church of Christ, is at liberty to assert, maintain, or publish, teach, or preach any thing contrary to what is professed, by that part of the church of which he is a member? If he see errors, in her profession, about which he cannot remain silent, let him bring his grievance before the courts, and abide their issue. If their deliverance relieve him, his end is gained. But if not, he must then consult with himself, whether separation be his duty: or rather the courts, how far he can be allowed to remain, except he satisfy them that their principles and regulations shall be maintained by him. In the event of his separation, then, I humbly presume, is the proper period, to state his views to the public, and account for his conduct. But to continue in the bosom of a church, to be intrusted with the instruction of her members, to live by her bounty, and enjoy a seat in her judicatories, and yet undermine her interests, so far, as to teach and disseminate peculiar views of his own, in opposition to the known articles of her profession, and which he swore at ordination to teach and defend; is certainly a species of the vilest dishonesty, dissimulation, and fraud, of which any man, of the smallest regard to conscience, or character, can be guilty. I make this observation in the general, in order to awaken the attention of the Christian people, lest, in our present convulsion, either preacher or minister in our connection, should have the effrontery of trespassing, in such an egregious manner, upon the comely order of the house of God, as to carry to the pulpit, sentiments in favours of the present rage, and in opposition to any of the articles which we profess as a church. For if once the breach be made here, we are *lost* as to the preservation of purity of doctrine, as a religious body. For upon the same principle, a Baxterian may teach the people his motley mixture, an Arminian train them up in legality: and, indeed, by what error may not the people be poisoned, who have committed themselves to our care for wholesome food, and congregations be turned away from the faith, before the courts come to the knowledge of such dreadful abuses?

That the principle of conformity to the church in her profession, for which I am now contending, is most expressly sanctioned by the great God even our Saviour, in his word, will appear, I hope, to the conviction of all, from these three examples, Acts xii. 2.—18. "When Peter was come to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, 'thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and did eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto

lation in which you stood to your brethren and your people, who were unfriendly to these alterations, could warrant you to appear at the bar of the public, with a question which had never met with a judicial discussion, nor any deliverance given upon it by our courts?—But above all, how far you could in justice to the articles in dispute, and in consistency with a regard for truth, propose such a question, about their relative importance, at a time when the public mind was in such a ferment, and the public opinion so completely afloat respecting every thing in which the Magistrate's power was any way concerned; and when the rage against the arrangements and deeds of former times, was so violent and general. To appeal to the public in such circumstances, was certainly offering but a poor com-

"them," &c. &c. From hence it is obvious, that these Jews had been accustomed to this rule in their former church relation, in the old testament church, that none of their teachers were to deviate from the profession they maintained. Rather than tolerate this, they will contend even with an apostle. Again, Peter's conduct establishes the principle in the fullest manner. In assigning his reasons, he acknowledges these brethren's right to be satisfied, and of consequence their right to call him to an account. And had his reasons not been good, there is a consequent acknowledgement, that he was censurable for taking such a liberty.

Acts xv. 24. "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment." Here again, by the solemn decision of this venerable synod, such as preach or publish any thing contrary to what is sanctioned by the church in her courts, are stigmatized as *troublers* of the people, and *subverters* of their souls. Every preacher and minister must have a *commandment* from those to whom they profess submission in the Lord, before they are at liberty to teach any new articles to the people. To do so without a commandment is a very bold thrust indeed at the authority of Christ in his courts, and the comely order in his house! A well authenticated complaint against such would oblige any of our courts, I should think, to pass a very pointed censure against him.

Act. xxi. 20.—26. By the advice of James and the Elders at Jerusalem, Paul is directed, to conform to the usages of that part of the church, in their zealous observances of the law of commandments contained in ordinances. Paul obeyed, and thereby set an example of this great Christian duty. That if it offend our church connections, to deviate from the accustomed order in that church, *even although there be no direct proof for it in the word of God*, it is our indispensable duty, for the sake of edification, to conform. Where then is the *charity*, or even good sense, of any preacher or minister, putting conscience and obligation to ordination vows, or vows at licence, out of the question, to rap his head against a pulpit, and disturb a church, or offend its members, by introducing his own notions, contrary to what he knows to be their avowed profession? Even common sense recoils at such an outrage upon all good order. Any civil society in the kingdom would, without scruple, expel the member who would act thus, in subversion of its order and rules.

pliment, either to ourselves, or to the religious profession we had hitherto maintained; and was bringing your pannel before an influenced judge, and prepossessed jury, without allowing him even the privilege of objecting to such an unfair mode of trial. Put the question about the importance of such articles, in these circumstances, and it required no great degree of penetration to anticipate, what, with multitudes, would be the decision.

At the same time I cannot help thinking, that it gives a most honourable display of the becoming steadfastness of many in the Secession, to their religious profession, that, although involved in the political speculations of the day, like the rest of their fellow subjects, they steered so clear of the influence of politics upon religious principle, when a proposal of alteration, in such very unfavourable circumstances, was put to them. And is it not pretty curious, that those, who complain loudest of the influence of the state upon the church, and of their connection, should bring forth such a question, at a time when it was morally impossible to decide upon it, without the influence of political opinion operating mightily in such a decision; and so were themselves most striking examples of the strongest connection.—If a change be necessary in any article we profess, let the article which is to undergo it, have at least a fair trial.

Upon comparing Mr. Frazer's petition with your Considerations, I perceive we have got a new set of terms and distinctions introduced into the Secession, which both you and he, had very pointedly condemned, only about 20 years ago, in the Appendix of the Act and Testimony re-exhibited, pages 179, 180, to which I refer you in the foot note.*

* According to the minute of Synod upon that business, the Appendix, as well as other papers connected with it, were printed by order of Synod, after their Committee, of which the Rev. Mr. Campbell of Stirling is the only surviving member, had prepared them for the press. You and Mr. Frazer, you know, were members of Court at that time. The sentiments in the Appendix, of consequence are yours; as you, with the rest of the Synod, acquiesced in them. Let us hear how far you differ from yourself, when the foot note to the Appendix is taken in connection with your Considerations.

"The popular plea advanced in support of such vague and extensive terms of Communion, is, that all the children of God have an undoubted right to the children's bread; and that it is not lawful to keep it from them. But will the ministers in the Presbytery, or Synod of Relief, plead an *exclusive* privilege to discern who are the children of God and who are not? May they not often be in a mistake as to this matter? Hath the church any other

The terms *essential*, and *circumstantial*: *Fundamental truths*, and doctrines of *inferior importance*, are certainly terms of a very vague and doubtful signification. And before any public teacher among us, particularly our Professor of Di-

ground upon which she can proceed in judging of real saintship, and in granting admission to the Lord's table, but a competency of knowledge, a profession of faith in Christ, and the purity of external deportment? May not a person have a right to the Lord's table in the sight of God, and yet be inadmissible by the church, on account of some particular circumstances in their case? and if she rejects them on that account, will this amount to a denial of their saintship, of which, by the way, none is judge, or can be judge, but God himself? Is not an *error* in the head with regard to the *doctrines* or *discipline* of the church of Christ, as really a scandal in the sight of God, as an *immoral practice*; and therefore sufficient to exclude from sealing ordinances, in a church formed upon that plan of *discipline* which Jesus Christ hath delivered to her in the holy Scriptures? If the apostle authoritatively says to the church of Thessalonica, and to all other churches, 2 Thess. iii. 6. Now we command you, brethren, IN THE NAME of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye WITHDRAW yourselves from every brother that WALKETH DISORDERLY, and not after the tradition which he RECEIVED of us, whether it be by denying that form of government and discipline, which Christ by his apostles hath appointed in his church; or, if he acts DISORDERLY in the criminal neglect of it, as a thing *indifferent*, as well as in any other part of his moral conduct, must the church in any subsequent period be condemned, because in obedience to that apostolical precept, she withdraws from him, and *refuseth* to hold communion with him?

What has led those of the Relief principles, as well as a vast number of others in Scotland, many of whom, it is hoped, are gracious persons, to adopt and defend such vague and unwarrantable terms of communion, is an unhappy distinction which they make between those things in religion that are *fundamental* or *essential*, and those that are *circumstantial* or *indifferent*. But in what page of the inspired volume is this distinction to be found?

It is frankly admitted, that there are some divine truths, and articles of faith, more clearly revealed in the holy Scriptures, and of greater importance than others, in a comparative view: (now mark the sequel) but will it therefore follow, that *any truth* revealed in the word of God, *any ordinance* of divine institution, or *any thing* that relates to the honour and glory of our exalted Redeemer, is, or ought to be accounted a matter of such indifference, that *professed Christians* may either maintain or deny it; adopt it into their creed or reject it, as shall be found most agreeable to their own inclinations, or the interest of their party? If *any* divine truth, or *any* divine ordinance, or *any* thing relative to the comely order and government of the church, could, with propriety, be called a thing *circumstantial* or *indifferent*, certainly our Lord Jesus Christ would not have given such a peremptory and particular charge to the prophet Ezekiel, as that which is recorded, chap. xlii. 10—13. "Shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and ALL THE FORMS thereof, and ALL THE LAWS thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the WHOLE thereof, and ALL the ordinances thereof, and do them." Another solemn charge exactly similar, and of the same import with that now mentioned, is recorded for our instruction, chap. xli. 5. The Lord said unto me, "Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, ALL THAT I SAY unto thee, concerning ALL the ordinances of the house of the

vinity, would venture to use them, especially for the purpose of investigating the propriety of altering our plan of fellowship, he ought unquestionably to have first ascertain-

Lord, and ALL the laws thereof; and mark well the ENTERING IN of the house, and EVERY GOING FORTH of the sanctuary."

Now, if any thing might reasonably be thought *indifferent* about the form and order of the house of God, here delineated in vision upon the mind of the prophet, the comings in, and the goings out of it; the terms upon which the worshippers may enter it, and the principles upon which they may go out from it, might be these *circumstantial* and *indifferent* things. Far from it. It is given in charge to the prophet, and to the whole house of Israel, to MARK WELL, and observe diligently the fashion of the house of God, in ALL THE FORMS thereof, and ALL THE ORDINANCES, and ALL the laws thereof; to set their mind to the serious study and careful OBSERVANCE of them, not as if they were things of *INDIFFERENCE*, about which they might or might not agree, and yet hold communion with one another, but as things of the greatest IMPORTANCE.

It will be said, perhaps, that the whole of this passage in Ezekiel hath an immediate respect to the Jewish dispensation; and therefore is not a proof directly in point to the present argument.—If any will be so hardy as to deny that this whole passage, as well as the context, is a prophetic representation of the gospel church, it will be to very little purpose, to reason with them upon any point of revealed truth.

But is the solemn charge which Jesus Christ, the alone king and head of the church, left with his disciples a little before his departure to the Father, liable to any such critical exception? "Go," said Jesus to the disciples, Mat. xxviii. 19, 20. "and teach all nations—to observe all things *whosoever* I have commanded you." Did the King of Zion appoint a particular form of government or discipline in the church, which is his spiritual kingdom, to be observed unalterably to the end of the world; or did he leave it as a thing *AMBULATORY* to be accommodated to the temper of the times, which professing Christians in future ages, might practise in what form they please, or neglect it in a great measure altogether, as a thing *INDIFFERENT* or *CIRCUMSTANTIAL*, provided this should suit either their inclinations or interests? If the blessed Jesus has appointed (as *certainly* he hath) a particular form of government and discipline to be observed in his church, can we suppose, if we think and reason like Christians, that he took no notice of it in his instructions to his apostles, or that he left them at full liberty to reckon it a matter of *indifference*, and to teach us to think of it in the same manner? Certainly not. "Teach them to observe all things *whosoever* I have commanded you" is the express commission; and those who under the character of ministers of Christ teach men otherwise, by calling some things *essential*, and others *indifferent*, with respect to the form and order of the house of the Lord our God and Redeemer, do in so far act in direct opposition to his express orders.

There the principle of our adherence as a religious body to every divine truth, to every divine ordinance, to every thing relative to the comely order and government of the church, in our public creed and profession, in opposition to the absurd and unscriptural distinction of *fundamental* or *essential*, and *circumstantial* and *indifferent* truths, is asserted and established in the clearest manner. For you and Mr. Frazer to act so diametrically opposite to your own avowed profession, as to use these terms in the very sense in which they are condemned by yourselves, is extremely offensive and stumbling.

ed his right, to *adopt terms condemned by the Synod*, and then to define these terms in his use of them, and classify his articles. For my own part, I would esteem it a singular favour if you could shew me your warrant from the word of God, first for taking upon you to use terms, and propagate notions condemned by the Synod, and set such an unscriptural example before the youth committed to your care; secondly, your warrant for the use of such distinctions at all; and then state the advantages to the cause of truth and godliness obtained from them, by other denominations among whom they have been hitherto in use. I would wish you, like a botanist with his flowers, to classify and arrange the various articles of divine revelation under their respective divisions according to these terms, else you will surely bewilder us. Under *essential and fundamental* truths, it is surely necessary, you arrange all the articles of belief which you require men to profess as the confession of their faith, in order to admission into your communion. Under *circumstantial and less important*, all those about which you will leave every man to think for himself, and teach for himself, and you will claim the same toleration. The magistrate's power about religion, and the obligation of our covenants on posterity, we are sure will stand first in this column. With your list, it will be highly gratifying to have your *rule*; and be sure it be stamped with the broad seal of heaven, as the only sure guide to direct us, in reading our bibles, to assign to each class its proper article. For without this, people who have not arrived at your measure of *illumination*, but are still involved in the mists of a "blind deference for fathers" may be greatly at a loss; and find your proposed change to be a vile, uncertain leap in the dark; and all you say upon your state of the question, an attempt to reason without any fixed principle.*

* Your friend Mr. Dick in his Synod Sermon, which, perhaps, although it had never seen the light, either from press or pulpit, would have been little loss either to the preacher, or the church of Christ, makes this acknowledgement. "That an attempt to select and classify articles, to count their number, and exhibit them *detached from other truths* is hazardous, and indeed not free from the charge of presumption. It is an usurpation of the prerogative of God, who alone can determine the exact measure of knowledge which is required to salvation." An acknowledgement sufficient, I should think, on more accounts than one, to ruin the credit of the scheme even with its fondest admirers! For if, by your own acknowledgement among yourselves, it be *hazardous* and not free from *presumption*, to make such an attempt, and our orders are to teach all things *whatsoever* Christ hath commanded, it would

Your proof, Sir, your proof from the holy Scriptures, warranting you to propose such a plan of fellowship in the church of Christ, before we concur with you in such a measure!

Except these things be done we have no proper standard, according to which any terms of fellowship can be fixed. What may be reckoned *essential* and *fundamental* truths this year, may be discovered by the advocates for liberty of conscience and freedom of enquiry, things only *circumstantial*, and of *inferior* importance the next; and because no standard is fixed, no check can be given to the change. What one man may reckon very *important* and *fundamental*, another conceives to be only of *inferior importance*; but both are good men, and for the sake of charity and moderation, should "agree to differ." Thus under the specious pretence of a more liberal and catholic spirit, men of the most discordant views and principles are huddled together in the same fellowship; and opportunity is given to change ground, to shift sides according as the humour of the times, and circumstances of the occasion, shall require any article to be transferred from fundamental to circumstantial, and from circumstantial to fundamental.

These appear to me the native, and necessary consequences of your plan. Beyond all doubt, you must have foreseen some of them at least; and therefore, as a candid exhorter of the community to accede to your views, it was but fair and honourable, to have had some *considerations*, apprizing them of their tendency. And here I wish both to be understood, and to declare my impressions, without any reserve. "I would not wish to affix to any man's words interpretations which he disavows, unless they be such as he cannot disavow without disingenuity, or without absurdity." To misrepresent you or your brethren who have co-operated with you in this unhappy contest, is most remote from my intention. But, Sir, when I compare Mr. Frazer's petition with the proceedings of the committee of Synod, who prepared the overture; when I read the overture itself, and your *Considerations* in commendation of all; this conclusion

surely be both wisest and safest for you, completely to abandon the measure, and content yourselves with the advice of the apostle Paul for once. 'Where to we have already attained,' in that happy connection of revealed truth exhibited in our subordinate standards, and professed by us as a church, 'let us walk by the *same* rule, let us mind the *same* thing.'

irresistibly presses upon my mind: *that the adoption of Forbearance as a leading principle in church fellowship; in other words, the toleration of diversity of sentiment in many things revealed in the Scriptures, was the FAVOURITE OBJECT; and that the affair of the magistrate's power about religion, and of the covenants, were fixed upon as articles most likely, at this time, to favour the attempt with least noise!* Introduce the principle, and the end is gained. Introduce the principle, and our unity of profession as a church is gone. Introduce the principle, and a foundation is laid to apply it as the remedy upon every future occasion, where farther deviation from the truths we profess, would render it necessary. In this point of view the articles in dispute were of the greatest magnitude; and if I am right, it was most disingenuous indeed, for the friends of these changes to endeavour to persuade their people that the things in dispute were mere trifles; and that none, but such as were ignorant or contentious, would refuse to yield such a small matter to their brethren. These are my views of the business; and if you disclaim all such intentions, if you disavow every thing in your Considerations that would favour such a design, and declare your entire satisfaction with every part of our Confession and Catechisms, except these two articles, I declare myself ready to apologize for my mistake. But, without such an assurance, I must be permitted to retain my views, and expose the dangerous tendency of the evil.

To give the reader an opportunity of judging for himself, I beg leave to solicit his attention for a few moments to the following statement.

Mr. Frazer's Petition.—“The doctrine of free grace reigning through the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the eternal life of men, in connection with all other *fundamental* truths, revealed in the oracles of God, is, I hope, a doctrine cordially believed, and explicitly preached, by all the ministers belonging to the Synod: and to their great honour, no Socinian, Arminian, or Neonomian error, repugnant to it hath hitherto been tolerated by them. But we profess adherence not only to fundamental truths, but also to many other doctrines of *inferior importance*. Among *these* are the power of the civil magistrate in regard to religion, and the perpetual obligation of our public national covenants upon posterity.—Doubtless the profession of a church ought perfectly to harmonize with her real princi-

"ples: and nothing either essential or circumstantial should
"be professed which is not fully believed."

What have we got here? (1.) A round assertion of the unscriptural distinction of fundamental truths, and doctrines of inferior importance:—of essential and circumstantial doctrines, in the presence of the supreme court, who, in their act and testimony, have condemned it. (2.) Information that the doctrines of inferior importance, to which we profess our adherence, are many; and that the magistrate's power in regard to religion, and the perpetual obligation of our covenants, are of this description. Of necessary consequence then, if forbearance be a remedy for dropping these from our profession, we have only to repeat the prescription, to be relieved from the rest. But what these are, as yet we have no information. (3.) Mr. Frazer's approbation of adherence to fundamental truths; but with regard to adherence to the *many things* of inferior importance, his language, although couched, is an indication of dissatisfaction. If members of Synod adopt principles contrary to any of these articles of inferior importance to which we profess our adherence, "he will not mention this to their discredit," and the "tolerant spirit that bears with such, he does not absolutely condemn." And the whole is followed up, by at least a very unguarded and unhappy mode of expression. "Nothing either essential or circumstantial ought to be professed which is not firmly believed." This seems to intimate, that the measure of our belief is to be the standard of the church's creed; and that according as the belief of church members changes, so are her articles to change also. If, of consequence, it shall happen, that the members of a church shall apostatize from the truth, that church must renounce these truths, because her members do not believe them.—The good old way is surely infinitely preferable to this. Let the church of Christ drop no article from her standards, till it be proved from the word of God to be wrong. Let her take care of the members she admits, that they be of the same faith with herself; but never change her creed, to answer the views of unbelievers; and if they be displeased, most undoubtedly leave her community in peace.

The proceedings of the Committee of Synod.

The majority refuse to investigate, wherein the disputed articles are contrary to the word of God; that if contrary,

by a proper explanation, the scruples of brethren may be removed: but pass their act of forbearance as the previous question in the following terms: "As the power respecting the civil magistrate, in said confession and larger catechism, as also in the national covenants of Scotland, and in the solemn league and covenant, has been, and still is a matter of doubtful disputation among good and faithful men, the Synod no longer make it a term of ministerial or christian communion, but will exercise forbearance with brethren, whatever their sentiments be on these articles." This Committee, let it be recollected, was appointed by the Synod to bring in an overture, to *unite the sentiments of both sides upon these articles*: but instead of making the attempt, the majority carry this measure at once. It is obviously an echo to the petition; and the tolerant spirit which Mr. Frazer does not absolutely condemn, receives the fullest sanction which the Committee could give it. The unavoidable consequence is: let good and faithful men have *doubtful disputation* about any other of these many articles of inferior importance, and you cannot but in point of consistency apply the same remedy. And thus step by step, "the *doubtful disputations of good and faithful men*," will relieve us, in due time, from the inconveniency of adhering to any of these many doctrines of inferior importance; not because they are contrary to the word of God, but because men professing godliness, do not reckon them of such importance as to be retained. But who will assure us, that some truths which are now reckoned fundamental will not, before this time, have shared the same fate?

Mr. Lawson's Considerations throughout.—Take a sentence or two as a specimen. "There are other truths which certainly ought not to have place among our terms of communion, unless we wish to exclude from religious fellowship, all who have not the same measure of understanding, or the same measure of pride with ourselves."—"Allowing the articles in question to be truths, if they belong not to that class of truth which ought to be articles of church communion, it must imply some degree, at least, of *tyranny*, to exclude persons from communion with us, who dare not swear that they believe them." This is surely plain enough. The class of *essentials only*, ought to be articles of church communion. It is a degree of *tyranny* to require an assent to the non-essentials. Of consequence,

while we profess an adherence to any of Mr. Frazer's *many* doctrines of inferior importance, Mr. Lawson reproaches us with tyranny. That this is the light in which we are to understand his classes, is evident from his state of the question. "The state of the question is not, whether the magistrate hath all the power which is ascribed to him in our public standards, but whether the doctrine concerning his power in religious matters, as it is asserted in them, be of so *great importance* in our religion, that all ministers and elders should be required to profess their belief of it?"

From this comparison, the evidence to me at least, is irresistible, that the establishment of the general principle was the GRAND OBJECT; and as it was necessary to introduce the principle by an application of it to some particular case, at first, the magistrate's power, in these times of high political contention, afforded as favourable an opportunity as any. Had this not been the darling object on the one side; and an opposition to such an unscriptural principle, with much offence at the most undue methods taken to propagate it, not taken a firm hold of the minds of members on the other, perhaps the scruple about the extent of the magistrate's power, by some explanation, might have been more easily removed. But nothing less than a complete change, in our profession and fellowship, appears to me to have been the object in the issue, by what was only *whispered* at first, as the scruples of some brethren about the extent of the magistrate's power with regard to religion. Multitudes in our connections; from the best of motives, have become friendly to change, because they perceive not how far the change will carry them. By this comparison, however, let them examine for themselves, and take the alarm in time, before measures be adopted that will not afterwards be so easily counteracted. For I am strongly apprehensive, the measure of forbearance is only at rest for a little; and its friends still waiting the opportunity of pressing it into operation. Neither speak I without reason when I say so.—I am prepared too for a mighty outcry by the keenest advocates for change, on account of what hath been so pointedly advanced; nor would it surprize me much, to perceive attempts to bring any thing else that is said in these letters into discredit, by a vague refusal, that such a change as that I have stated above was meant. That it never was meant by many individuals who have rather

gone along with present measures than make any opposition unto them, I will readily grant. But I have adduced my evidence: and till the authors, to whom I have made the appeal for what I have said, shall, in as pointed and precise a manner, satisfy the public that they intended no such thing, by declaring their satisfaction with, and attachment to every thing else in our confession, I beseech the candid enquirer to judge, the evidence adduced, for himself; and not be prepossessed by any unfavourable remarks against us, till he see the error with his own eyes.

A few examples may perhaps be of service, to open the eyes of many as to the tendency of your forbearance. Presbytery, in opposition to Episcopacy on the one hand, and Independency on the other, hath been reckoned by us a very important part of revelation; and we profess that the Lord Jesus Christ hath, in his word, left this particular form of government for his church: but perhaps the period is not far distant, and I wish your Considerations have not been the opening unto it, when it shall be denied even by some of ourselves, that the Lord Jesus Christ hath fixed any particular form of government in his church, but left it to the discretion of her office-bearers, to adopt what form the circumstances of the times shall point out. A spirit of Independency appears to be the rage of the times. And no wonder, when Presbyterians testify such a predilection for several of their peculiarities; and trifle so shamefully with their engagements, to maintain the very opposite. Where is the Independent who will afford such cause of triumph, to other denominations over them?—Creeds and confessions, as tests of orthodoxy and bonds of union, have hitherto been found of the greatest use in the church of God; neither can a church continue any time in unity and purity without them; but the native tendency of your proposals is to set these aside, as in a great measure useless, and, in a great many articles of religion, allow men a toleration to think as they please.—Neither will what you call fundamental truths be long secured from attempts towards a change either. Appropriation, for example, in the nature of saving faith, hath, in this part of the church, been hitherto reckoned a very fundamental truth: but what shall you say, if some of our young ministers and preachers teach a doctrine the opposite of this, and in your divinity-hall some scruple not to say, that the evil hath had its origin?

Justification by the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the exclusion of every thing wrought in the creature, or done by it, is, according to Mr. Frazer's petition, the grand fundamental truth; but by silently bearing for a while with the introduction of Arminian phrases into our pulpits, our minds will soon become reconciled to Arminian ideas. It may be ignorance of the doctrine at first, rather than bad design, or a rage for books of taste without adverting to their errors, and neglect to study divine truth in a connected arrangement of it. But whatever be the cause, a few instances of these allowed to pass, in the spirit of misguided charity and moderation, may soon ensnare men's souls with another gospel, than the gospel of Jesus Christ.—The full, free, and unlimited offer of the gospel to sinners of every description, hath been professed by us as a very leading article of our faith: but if any of your students shall become preachers, and restrict the blessings of the new covenant to *penitent* and *sensible sinners*, a few instances of this allowed to pass, will soon operate to a species of legality, the more dangerous, as it is both plausible and popular.

Hitherto we have taught, that union with Christ, justification by his righteousness, a new covenant relation to God as our Father and our God, and the exercise of a constant faith upon the Lord Redeemer for all, are the proper principles and sources from whence evangelical holiness can be drawn. Upon no topic of holiness ought a preacher to discourse, according to our profession, without holding these up to the faith of his audience, as essential prerequisites to all acceptable obedience. But if once preachers, or ministers, either not understanding the subject, or not relishing such an arrangement, or perhaps both, shall, as the great reformers of our age no doubt! by the *introduction* of practical preaching, talk away about the necessity of holiness and good works, without bringing these fully into view, or perhaps not stating such principles of holiness at all; only tolerate this mode of preaching in a few instances, and charity, forbearance and moderation will soon be presented as a shield of protection for such want of ability, to teach others this doctrine also.—Thus, by your forbearance, and our present rage for change, a door is opened for every deviation from the truth. These evils must result too from your neglect of the first and most

indispensable of all services you owed both to the church and to the world; and that was, to define your terms, to fix the nature and the number of your fundamental truths, and then ascertain the number and the names of your doctrines of inferior importance, or circumstantial, with your "thus saith the Lord," in confirmation of the whole.

You have indeed said, page 65, that "it is necessary to hold those doctrines as terms of communion which are essential to the Christian life, or necessary for maintaining *the peace*, the liberty of the Christian church, and the government and discipline established in her by Christ." But even this is quite too vague: for what some reckon essential to the Christian life, other *good and faithful men* may not: and thus we are as much at a loss as ever. What some reckon necessary for maintaining the liberty of the Christian church, others may not. You reckon it "some degree, at least, of tyranny" to make what you call circumstantial, or unimportant truths terms of fellowship. We, on the other hand, consider it as the most dishonourable of all fetters, to be so entrained with unscriptural notions of liberty of conscience, and freedom of enquiry, as to abandon any part of revealed truth in the profession of the Christian church, to render her fellowship consistent with these notions.

One very important concession you have indeed made, in this little you have said concerning your terms of communion, and that is, that what "is necessary for maintaining the *PEACE* of the church, should be one." Since then your measures of alteration have so completely broken our peace, by your own concession, you become bound to abandon them, and for the sake of *peace* retain our formula as it was. However unimportant the articles in dispute might appear to you formerly, yet in as much as the pressing of your measure would destroy our peace, the retaining of them is now a matter of the greatest importance; and, according to your own position, it is necessary for the peace of the church, to hold them as terms of communion. Yes, Sir, and till you prove them to be contrary to the word of God, you are bound also to conform to them. Paul did not think that the "observance of the law of commandments contained in ordinances," was of that importance as to be a term of fellowship in the Christian church, because it was done away by the death of Christ; and yet when he came

up to Jerusalem, and found them all zealous of this, so much did he study the peace and edification of his brethren, that he also conformed. There was indeed this difference between you and him: he had come under no vow at ordination to maintain this against all contrary opinions: but you, Sir, with the example of Paul on the one hand, and your own vow on the other, with the concession you have made respecting the peace of the church, are shut up to the indispensable necessity of renouncing your scheme, and restoring our tranquillity, by a public assurance that you have done so.

I am your's, &c.

LETTER III.

REVEREND SIR,

THAT the holy Scriptures is the unerring standard of all doctrine, respecting either faith or practice, and by which all doctrine is to be examined, is a principle which, I trust, is held sacred by all of us. It is a principle which those, who differ from you in this unhappy contest, are as zealous in maintaining, and preaching to our audiences, as you and the rest of our brethren can be. It hath therefore both astonished me, and pained me not a little, that some of you, especially of our younger brethren, perhaps with as much zeal, in this business, as prudence, should have talked so much of late, in their public discourses, *about judging for ourselves; about examining all things by the word of God; and not believing as our fathers believed, and because they believed, &c.&c.* Exhortations, abstractly considered, extremely proper, and which we are very desirous should be observed by all!

But, in the present existing circumstances, such exhortations from those in your views, have had so much of an air of suspicion, if not accusation, that the opposition you have experienced, hath arisen from inattention to the holy Scriptures, from a "blind deference to fathers," as you express it, and an ignorant perseverance in error, in opposition to God's revealed will, that it might have served the ends of edification much better, if these exhortations had been spared. By the extensive circulation of insinuations of this nature, much injury hath been done to the credit of what we profess, and much injury to the character of those who are for maintaining it, till you prove it, by your *examination of the word of God*, to be wrong.

And, if these brethren have such fears, that we are so very ignorant of the Scriptures, and deficient in examining them, it would have been extremely obliging, if they had mixed some *opposite* portions out of them, for our conviction, with the loose, general, and unsupported assertions, which have been so frequently detailed by some of them. Often have I wished to hear, from the word of God, our brethren's warrant for their novel notions; but the loss they have always discovered here, with the misapplication of Scripture when they had recourse to it, hath confirmed me still more against your scheme.

After your state of the question, you have indeed referred to several passages and cases in the holy Scriptures, for the purpose of reconciling our minds to the forbearance you propose. But, to me at least, there is not that native application to the point you wish to establish by them, which is necessary to convince and satisfy. You are allowed by all who know your accomplishments, to be mighty in the Scriptures, and am persuaded the character is just. From you, then, it is to be expected, that the fullest proof which the Scriptures contain, will be adduced in support of your opinion; and I candidly confess, you are the only one, as far as I have had the opportunity of hearing, who hath, with any degree of plausibility, looked the Scriptures in the face upon this subject. And yet, they are the men, that make the greatest noise about examining all things by the word of God; about being honest, and yielding to the force of truth; about making the preconceived notions of men yield to the authority of God speaking in his word! At the same time, to use your own language, your "examples do not afford a clear indisputable proof," of the point you wish to establish, and, upon your own principle, is not a sufficient warrant for a change.

You tell us, page 6. that "our Lord, in person, was the teacher of the first ministers that appeared in the Christian church. But, you ask, did they understand every article of truth, before they were sent forth to preach in the Holy Land, or even before they were sent forth "into all the world, to preach the gospel to every creature?" The answer is obvious. No! they did not. And what minister or preacher, now when the canon of revelation is compleat, does so any more than them? But pray, Sir, what makes this to your purpose? Did our Lord tell them, that of the

doctrines which he had taught them, and of the *all things* which he had commanded them to preach to others, some were fundamental, and others of inferior importance? The fundamental were to be the terms of fellowship in his church, but those of inferior importance, "ought not to have place among them." Without you can shew that he gave them something like this in charge, it is extremely difficult to perceive, how his example, to which you have alluded, can serve your cause.

The apostle Peter is your next example: and I appeal to the unprejudiced reader, if you be any more successful with him. That venerable man of God was honoured to introduce a most extraordinary change into the fellowship of the church of Christ, when "it pleased God to visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." Neither would he venture to deviate, in a *single iota*, from the acknowledged profession of the church, till, by an express command, in his vision from heaven, he was authorised to do so. Immediately upon his conduct giving offence, he met the question fairly, and allowed a full investigation: and it was not till the church was satisfied, that they acquiesced, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!" Support your new scheme, Sir, by as clear and express authority from the sure word of prophecy, and let us see it; and the church will have every reason to thank you for the information, and will accede to your views. But till then, you must excuse us, although we say we are far from being pleased at the confusion, vexation, and grief, which you and your brethren have occasioned, and at their refusal to allow an investigation of your conduct.

You tell us here, that the Jewish brethren at Jerusalem, appear to "have had contracted and narrow views concerning the grace of God to the Gentiles." But, ask you, "Did Peter ever imagine that they ought to be censured for these mistaken notions?" And who would imagine this any more than Peter? Peter had no better notions about the grace of God to the Gentiles than themselves, till by a vision from heaven his mistake was corrected: and whenever the revelation was made known to them they rejoiced in it. But could Peter have satisfied them no better about the change he introduced, you will pardon me for saying, than you have done about the change you wish, I have no doubt

but his brethren the apostles, and other office-bearers, with the private members of the church, would, like Paul in another case to which you refer, "*have withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed.*" On the other hand, after such a clear revelation of the will of heaven, respecting the calling of the Gentiles, they would have been extremely culpable, had they shut their eyes against this light.

The terms *bigotry*, and *narrow minded brethren*, however applicable to the case to which you refer, abstractly taken, yet, considering the matter at issue to which you mean to make the application, perhaps there might have been no impropriety although you had spared them. They are both vague and senseless, in the modern use of them at any rate; and, considering the professions of charity, meekness, and gentleness, you have made in your introduction to these Considerations, such terms from you were scarce to have been expected. "Was not your method of conciliating us who differ from you to have been the same with Paul? Were not you and your brethren, the apostles of charity and moderation, to have imitated the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ?" How then comes it to pass, that in this unhappy difference, all who have most to say against our confession, the obligation of our covenants, and a conscientious adherence to our religious profession, till it be proved to be wrong, obtain so much applause among you as the men of sense, understanding and superior enlargement! While those, who, from their reverence for the oath of God, stand up in their defence, and complain of being offended at such indecent liberties, in brethren who are bound by the same oath with themselves, obtain no other redress, than the epithets, ignorant, bigotted, narrow minded, contracted and uncharitable? How comes it to pass, that suppliant brethren for moderation to themselves on account of their scruples, no sooner think they have got any thing in their favour, than all the forms and rules of discipline are rigidly adhered to, in their application to those people of our fellowship who are ignorant of forms: but who wish to adhere to what they profess, till they see it to be wrong? This is surely something different from the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ! While you make a claim upon us for the exercise of charity and moderation, ought you not to set us the example, by behaving towards us more respectfully, and by putting an interpretation upon

our conduct more favourable, and am bold to say, more consistent with truth? In refusing to go along with you we do you no wrong; but in the steps you have taken to accomplish your object, we think both our religious profession, and those who appear in its defence, are injured exceedingly. What would have been the harm of ascribing an honest and commendable zeal for truth, to the conduct of those who opposed you; even although you had reckoned them weak and unenlightened men: of supposing us to be actuated by a fear of violating our engagements at ordination; and of involving ourselves and our people in error and confusion in the issue? These, am certain, are the fears of some. And as to the people who want no alteration, since your side of the question are beyond all doubt parties in the cause, has it not something of the air of injustice, and perhaps is little short of the prostitution of discipline, to exercise it even to the length of cutting off, of some from our body, because they will not submit to an alteration in those religious principles, which you became bound at your ordination to defend? And this is your moderation and forbearance! I see now, what am loath to say, but must say it to warn others of their danger. Give you the change you want, and you will soon make us feel, by the weight of your discipline, that we must either conform to your alterations, or you will render it a most afflictive condition to remain in connection with you. I am sorry to bring this forth: but the conduct of our courts to the Christian people in some instances already, is a mournful proof of it, and my only motive in giving it this publicity, is to rouse others to be duly apprized of their danger, and to resist the alterations in contemplation in time.

But to return.—The argument you draw from the example of Christ as a teacher, and Peter as a minister, is to me at least, quite a new one! "If," you say, "the disciples of Jesus had not learned from him, during the attendance of some years, every truth of religion, is it to be supposed that candidates for the ministry will learn in the course of a few years attendance upon the instructions of men like themselves, every truth contained in the *new testament*, and be so well established in the belief of every truth, as to be qualified for entering into a sacred vow that they will hold it fast to the end of their lives?"—The conclusion from hence is pretty obvious, Sir, That men ought

to be admitted to serve in the gospel of Christ, just according to the extent of their knowledge, and progress in their studies. Of consequence all formulas and creeds, as standing tests of orthodoxy in the church, ought to be set aside; and every youth you train up for the ministry have a formula for himself, according to the progress he hath made under your inspection. I have no wish to misrepresent you: but this conclusion appears to me fair and necessary. It is surely a great misfortune to the secession that their Professor of Divinity entertains such sentiments, and can allow himself to publish them. And if he does not entertain them, it is very unfortunate that he hath stumbled upon such language as seems fairly to imply them. I leave it with you to determine, whether the ignorance, unbelief, and carnality of the disciples of Jesus, *during their attendance on him* were not peculiar, and designed of God as some very bitter ingredients of the curse lying upon him. To draw your general conclusion from such a peculiarly circumstantiated case then, is surely not fair. Neither can the particular commissions which they executed in the time of his ministry serve as a general rule to us. It is with their ordination after his resurrection we have properly to do, as an example to us with regard to the point in hand. And I appeal to their commission, Mat. xxviii. 19. 20. if their ordination was not to teach to others all that he had taught them. Much that he had taught them they had forgotten. "But," said Christ, "the Comforter which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, *whatsoever I have said unto you.*" They were ordained apostles it is true, before this promise was accomplished; but they were not to enter upon the work of apostles till the time of the promise should come. "They were to tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were endowed with power from on high." These things taken together, destroy, I apprehend, the premises you intend to institute.—But let us examine your conclusion.

"Is it to be supposed that candidates for the ministry will learn in the course of a few years attendance, &c. every truth contained in the new testament?" &c. This is surely intended to represent it as a most unreasonable thing, to demand a vow at ordination, "to hold fast what we profess to the end of our lives." But you might have

stated the matter fairly. Our confession of faith and catechisms larger and shorter, the doctrines of which we became bound to maintain at ordination, contain only a *summary* of the truth of revelation, not every truth. In many of them have we been instructed from our youth up. And with regard to the investigation of them, and of the rest, from the word of God, so as to swear "to hold them fast all the days of our lives," I cannot see it to be such an un-supposable case as you would represent it.—As to your mode of expression here *to learn every truth*, to be *established in every truth*, and to *vow to hold it fast*, &c. the design of it is abundantly obvious; although perhaps it will serve no good purpose either to admire or imitate it. If you can persuade your readers that it is unreasonable to require, and impossible to swear in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness to hold fast all the doctrines in our confession and catechisms, then you succeed in sinking the credit of our subordinate standards, and in prepossessing the minds of candidates against a vow of adherence unto them. This is surely a most serious matter; and a strong confirmation of what I have asserted before, that a great deal more than the extent of the Magistrate's power, is the ultimate object of this business.

But what do you mean by every truth contained in the *new testament*. Do you not instruct our students in the holy Scriptures at large, including the old as well as the new testament? If not, when did you receive instructions, and *who* gave you them, to restrict their studies to the new testament? When I was favoured with the instructions of your worthy predecessor, and he was your Professor as well as mine, he made no distinction between the old and new testament, in inculcating the study of the Scriptures upon us. He taught us after the example of Paul, and I thought it had been the uniform doctrine of all the priesthood in the Secession, that "ALL Scripture," the old testament beyond all doubt no less than the new, "is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable* for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." N. B. The old testament with a small part of the new, if he had any at the time when he wrote this epistle to Timothy, was Paul's bible! "Whatsoever," he adds, "was written afore time was written for our learning, that

we through patience, and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope."

"*Every truth in the new testament.*" This is a curious limitation: and I should be glad to know, upon what authority, you or any religious instructor, although he were not connected, as you are, with a body who is known to profess the very opposite, is warranted to make it. The reason of such a limitation hath often been cause of surprise to me. And whether it be to get rid of the very knotty difficulties, respecting the Magistrate's power in religion, and the obligation of our covenants on posterity, which are contained in the old testament, they who have recourse to the limitation best know. I will by no means assert it: although it be the only probable conjecture for the restriction which hath occurred to my own mind. I am very loath to speak in such language to our Professor of Divinity, but am constrained to say it, by what you have said before me. I never had the remotest suspicion you were a man of such sentiments, and it hath grieved me exceedingly, that, in your professional situation, you should have it in your power, to impart and to recommend such doctrines to the youth, from the different parts of the Secession, who are afterwards to fill the pulpits of our congregations, and that the Synod, by resisting an enquiry, should allow such leaven to leaven the whole lump.

Apollos is your next example, page 8. And because he was instructed only in the baptism of John, you would infer, that uniformity in profession, ought not to be required of all the public teachers, united in the same church fellowship. The inference is not expressed in your words, but I hope I have fairly hit the idea. But, Sir, can you demonstrate that the circumstances of the church then, in which he obtained licence to preach the gospel, and ours are parallel? Can you inform us besides, of the various articles contained in John's baptism? From whom did Apollos obtain licence to preach? or did his licence authorize him to teach any thing, *contrary* to the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, which the church professed? We know he was "mighty in the Scriptures; he was instructed in the way of the Lord; he was fervent in spirit," which imply very distinguished qualities of a preacher of the gospel. A solution of these things will enable us better to judge of the propriety of your inference.

"Priscilla and Aquilla," you add, "heard him: and although they knew the way of the Lord much more perfectly than he did, they did not require nor request him to desist from preaching," &c. Aquilla and Priscilla you know were private christians, and I thought that we Presbyterians had held it as a principle of Scriptural subordination, that it is not the province of any private christian to request any preacher, whom the rulers of the church licence, to desist. The religious experience of this godly couple, and the opportunities of the apostle Paul, which they had enjoyed, gave them a larger and more accurate knowledge of many things, than, perhaps, he had. But can any thing else be inferred from hence, than this, that we may sometimes address private christians, who, were it not for the commission we carry, could better instruct us, than we stand up to instruct them? And as to the instance in general, nothing surely is more foreign from the design of the Holy Ghost, in bringing Apollos forward into view at all, or in transmitting the abridged account he hath given us of him, than to serve as a proof, that, after the canon of revelation is compleat, and the church of Christ hath attained, by much labour, and patience, and persecution, and watching, and prayer, to a comfortable and connected view of divine truth, in the various parts of it, she should cast all or any of these away: and, in order to favour some mistaken notions, about liberty of conscience, and freedom of enquiry, sit down again, upon a vague, and indetermined scheme of fellowship, to please men, I will not yet say of my brethren, "of corrupted minds," although if they persist, the charge will inevitably be preferred against them.

Paul is the next example you quote. And the most unhappy instance for your purpose you could have adduced. You fight most manfully, in the course of a few sentences, and carry off the palm with much triumph, because you had none to combat! Meats, whether they be clean or unclean: days, whether they be regarded to the Lord or not regarded: These are proper objects of forbearance according to what Paul hath said in the 14th chap. to the Romans. What you say here, we will subscribe most cordially. It would be the highest presumption in any of us, to impose such things upon his brother. Because we have no warrant, from the word of God, to do so. Things

about which the Holy Ghost is either altogether silent, or about which he hath given no certain sound, are properly the objects of forbearance. But wherein the Holy Ghost hath intimated his will to the church, and the church hath recognized that doctrine as part of her profession, all her members, particularly her office-bearers, being bound by church covenant, to walk together in fellowship, become mutual guardians of the truth, and of one another. In such a relation, it would be an instance of unfaithfulness to a brother, as well as unfaithfulness to our adorable Redeemer, to grant a toleration of sentiment, contrary to what we profess, and the Holy Ghost hath revealed. Satisfy us, then, that the different articles, you are for casting out of the place of terms of fellowship, are of the same nature with Paul's meats and days, and I have no doubt, but we will most cordially harmonize. But till then, we will resist to the utmost, all your attempts to press upon us, such an unscriptural measure.

Your next quotation is from his epistle to the Philippians, the 3d chap. and 15th verse. I wish you had looked this text, a little more fully in the face; for if there be a passage in all the book of God, that enjoins any thing like unity in sentiment, and profession, this is certainly one of the most striking. "Let us, then, as many as be perfect, be *thus minded*." And if in any thing ye be otherwise minded," now mark the remedy! Does the apostle enjoin them to frame an overture, and pass it into a law, that, in future, they shall pursue such a line of conduct, as to *continue*, and *increase* this supposed diversity of sentiment, and tolerate each other in maintaining contradictory views? Does he advise them to discuss the question, of the *relative importance* of the thing, in which they are otherwise minded, to see whether they can drop it out of the list of their terms of fellowship, or not? No, Sir, No! He gave them a very different counsel. He exhorts them, by all means, to preserve the unity to which they had hitherto attained, in the things of God. And, if upon any article they had different views, to wait on God, in prayer and investigation of the holy oracles, for light in the matter; and, for their encouragement in this, he assures them by promise, that God will vouchsafe the *necessary revelation*, that their unity in sentiment, and profession, be not interrupted. But what is there in all this to favour

your new scheme?—And you will be pleased particularly to mark the sequel. “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” They must possess an uncommon talent for criticism, indeed, who can reconcile this, with Mr. Frazer’s indirect lamentation, that we profess adherence to many doctrines of inferior importance! and with your attempts to persuade us, that these ought not to be terms of communion. Nay, upon your plan, how is it possible, that this apostolical injunction can be put in practice? for if we “agree to differ,” that is surely an agreement, not to walk by the same rule, nor to mind the same thing.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the good-will you and Mr. Dick have shewn, to press this text into your service, it completely baffles all your endeavours, and calls upon the generation to renounce your unscriptural scheme. Whatever attainments the church of Christ hath made, by the united wisdom of her office-bearers, directed by the word and Spirit of the Lord, for a succession of ages, she is commanded, by this injunction, to abide by these; and to see that her members deviate, in nothing, from them. Thus uniformity in sentiment, uniformity in rule and government, is enjoined upon all the professed friends of the Redeemer in as direct terms, in this passage, as language can allow. “Far am I from saying, Sir, that this article is not written with great plainness of speech.” Paul, honest man, like our venerable ancestors, was not quite up to our modern doctrine of “liberty of conscience!” and therefore, to allude to your own saying, it would be more honourable, because it would be more candid, to allow that our venerable apostle had not clear views of the *natural rights of man*, than to attempt to twist his words into a consistence with those notions of toleration, that are now so common, and that were so rare in the Christian church, upwards of seventeen hundred years ago!

It surprized me not a little, to find the late Mr. Brown’s authority pressed into your service, in your foot note, page 9. although it is well known, in what abhorrence he held the scheme, you would oblige him to patronize. You quote him to prove, that every religious doctrine should not be an article of fellowship among Christians: But all he says is, “that men may have different views of many divine expressions.” That, Sir, is very different from doctrines, so

40
that your appeal to him makes nothing for you. I am glad however you sustain his authority, and perhaps shall have occasion to have recourse to it afterwards. Only in quoting him for this, might you not, when you came to speak of our covenants, have favoured us with a sentence or two from him there also; especially as it is scarcely half a dozen lines beneath the extract you have made. "The continued obligation of our ancestors covenants they, the Seceders that is, boldly maintain: at ordinations and other occasions, they solemnly declare their adherence thereto." These are the sentiments "of men approved in Christ," Sir!

Your quotation about Constantine's ladder, and insinuation as if we, who resist your measures, were acting the part of the pope, and even going beyond him, are surely exceedingly unhandsome. I am sorry to say, that to me you discover a considerable fondness, through the whole of these Considerations, to point out a strong analogy, between the principles presently professed in the Secession, and the vile tenets of the church of Rome; and we get pretty broad hints, repeatedly, that we resemble the man of sin in many of his features. And this is charity and moderation! I feel far from being pleased, at such treatment, from brethren acting so contrary, as we think, to the engagements mutually pledged to *one another*; as well as to God to *maintain, assert, and defend* what we profess, till it be proved to be wrong. But a soft answer turns away wrath. It is a pity "our corrupt passions dispose us to judge hastily concerning our opponents." This you know is your own observation, and therefore will take it in good part.

In page 10. it appears to me that you have blended two things, which are surely very distinct, and it is a fallacy in your reasoning, which frequently occurs: namely, private opinion, and the public profession of the church of Christ. "If we can bear no difference in sentiment from our own, where is our charity and forbearance?" It would be the highest arrogance, to insist upon every man, to think as much of the Synod's overture as you do. I have the same liberty, and perhaps a good deal more, considering our church relation, to think it a most improper measure, and in this public manner to warn my Christian brethren, of its pernicious tendency, as you have to recommend it. To allude to your own language, "are you perfectly sure,

that you are under no mistakes in your judgment" about these disputed points, and the alterations you are for introducing; and that an undue rage about *liberty* hath not, in any respect, misled you? "Are there no remainder of blindness in your mind, uncertainty and error in your judgement, as well as corrupt affections in your heart" respecting forbearance, about certain doctrines of our holy religion, as unimportant articles in church communion? "You know but in part," and you and Mr. Dick "see through a glass darkly." "When you impose all your notions upon your neighbour, are you sure that you impose no errors upon them? Before you compel your brethren to *swallow down* all your notions" respecting important and unimportant doctrines, and the changes you are for introducing upon these, 'make *yourself* sure, that every one of them, without exception, is true."

But, what hath been adopted as the public profession or opinion, if you will, of the church, according to the Scriptures, is not my opinion, nor yours either, Sir. And therefore neither charity, nor forbearance, warrants you to accommodate that profession, either to your own views, or to the views of your neighbour. It is the duty of all to bring their minds to the mind of the Holy Ghost; but by no means to model his instructions, to their peculiar views. When the articles of a church's profession have been found and acknowledged to be agreeable unto the word of God, and founded upon it, all, in her fellowship, particularly her priesthood, are bound by the authority of her head, "to walk by the same rule, and to mind the same things," and in walking thus, they walk upon sure ground. But if any fall out with the head, and reckon these too strict for them, who is to blame for this? The church lays them under no compulsion, either to join in her fellowship at first, or even to continue when connected: but must the rest act an unfaithful part, in subverting the constitution of the church, contrary both to conviction, and the sacred obligation of a vow, to please them?

But let us hear your argument from the *sins of daily practice*, and which Mr. Dick hath employed in his Synod Sermon. "Are such mistakes in judgement as are consistent with vital religion, so much worse than the sins of our daily practice, that we must be excommunicated for the former, whilst the latter are universally tolerated, as the

inseparable attendants of erring humanity in the best of men?"—What have we got here, Sir? Sentiments, if I don't mistake you, the most wild and extravagant, that ever were uttered, by any public instructor in our connection! I shall examine first your premises and then your conclusion. Your premises contains a position at once unscriptural, and shamefully loose, in point of morality. Are "the sins of our daily practice universally tolerated as the inseparable attendants of erring humanity in the best of men?" This is what you say; and in your present use of the position, approve of it, as right that it should be so. A most horrible sentiment! nor could I think it yours, till I perceived the use you were making of it. Let us bring it to the word of God and see how it will stand the test in this trial. "Thou shalt not suffer sin to *ly* upon thy brother; but thou shalt in *any wise* rebuke thy brother." Is this tolerating the sins of daily practice? If "it be *sin*," whether the inseparable attendant of erring humanity in the best of men or not, we are not to suffer it to *ly* upon him. Nay his being a good man, renders it so much the more criminal. "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish ought from it." This is surely a flat contradiction of your position: only, Sir, the quotation is not from the *new* testament: it is taken from the old! But the new is as direct, in condemnation of such a shameful relaxation of morals, as the old. "Whoever shall break one of these *least* commandments, and shall *teach men so*! he shall be called the *least* in the kingdom of heaven." And so *intolerant* was Paul to his brother Peter, that he would by no means let an "inseparable attendant of erring humanity" in this good man pass, but withstood him to the face, because he was to be *blamed*. If this be the tendency of your tolerant principles, may God of his abundant mercy prevent the generation, from being carried away by its influence! Let this maxim of yours once become popular, in the world, and the interests of morality will not be much indebted to you, for giving it your sanction. And this is your premises.

Let us next attend to your conclusion. Are "such mistakes as are consistent with vital religion, so much worse than the sins of our daily practice, that we must be excommunicated for the former, whilst the latter are universally tolerated?" This is surely plain enough. Accord-

ing to your plan, and the present reasoning, we must tolerate every opinion that is *consistent with vital religion*, else our terms of fellowship will "imply a degree, at least, of tyranny in them." And these are the sentiments our Synod refused to examine! I beseech my Christian brethren in the Secession to mark this, and ponder its tendency; that by a constitutional intimation of their opposition unto it, the evil may be counteracted in time. Nay even although it were the case, that "the sins of daily practice in the best of men were universally tolerated," how unfair from such a relaxation in morals, to plead for an equal toleration, of religious sentiment!—*Consistent with vital religion*, if I understand you, means, consistent with a gracious state. And is it possible, Sir, that you would be for tolerating all mistakes in judgement, as you design error, if consistent with a gracious state? This would make very speedy work indeed, in destroying any thing like purity of doctrine, in the Secession! I have no doubt but many Roman Catholics are in a gracious state, and will you plead for a toleration of their mistakes in judgement? But you cannot do otherwise if you be consistent with your own position. Quakers, Anabaptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Independents, Baxterians, Arminians, &c. may possess vital godliness, and I doubt not but many of them do. Their mistakes of judgement are consistent then with a gracious state, and therefore you must tolerate them! I fondly hope you have no intention of carrying matters thus far. But it is not with your intentions, but with your expressions, and declarations, I have to do. These are the fair and necessary consequences of what you have said: aye, and the necessary consequences in the issue, of the principles of toleration; you are so zealous to have introduced among us.

Blame me not for drawing such inferences. Blame yourself for using such language, and employing such arguments as involve consequences so destructive to religion, and, for the mercy of the generation if they will see it, consequences so well calculated, to expose the tendency, of your dangerous plan.

Having investigated the passages from Scripture which you produce, to warrant, as you think, the change of our terms of fellowship, you propose; I will take the liberty of contrasting, with your statement, those texts of Scripture,

which favour the principle of church communion, we have hitherto held, and then leave it with the unprejudiced reader, to determine, whether your's, or our's, have the most natural, obvious, and extensive application of the word of God, in it's favours? We assert then, *that unity in sentiment and profession of all that God hath revealed for our faith and practice, as an indispensably necessary bond of union, in affection and love, is uniformly held out, by Christ and his apostles, as the GREAT OBJECT, all the members of his church were to have constantly in view, in their walking together in holy fellowship.* If then we can establish this to have been the original principle in church communion, it follows of consequence, that no part of the Christian church, is warranted, in succeeding ages, to depart from it.

Without having recourse to the Old Testament Church, in establishing this principle, let us proceed at once to the apostolical commission, which it is hoped you will allow to be the commission of the ministers of the gospel, in all succeeding ages. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,—teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." No distinctions, you will observe, between important and unimportant doctrines, here! No scope for variety of speculation," here! Whatsoever Christ taught them, or his word and Spirit were farther to teach them, the orders were express: all these things, they were to teach to others, and teach them to *observe* them. But how could they "teach all things whatsoever he commanded," if the ministers of religion, in succeeding ages, were to agree to tolerate contrary opinions among themselves, with regard to these all things, and in order to favour such a toleration, sit down and frame an overture of a law for that purpose? No, Sir, the rule is most express. You are to teach these all things. I am to teach these all things. And in order that we may commit the same trust to faithful men, who shall teach others also, we must surely be satisfied, as to their belief of these all things, and their *faithfulness* to teach them to others. And as to an "agreement to differ about things of less importance," recollect, I entreat you, Sir, what Christ says, in his sermon upon the mount, of the minister who would teach men such a notion. As if foreseeing how fond some would be, of such a vile conceit, he declares, "Whoever shall break one

of these least commandments, and *shall teach men so*, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."—"If any man shall *take away* from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life." Declare any article of faith of so little importance, that men may think or teach as they please concerning it, and it will soon sink into such general disrepute, that you might almost as well expunge it from your bible. But to proceed—

Whenever the Christian church was modelled, and an accession made to her members, by means of Peter's sermon, it is expressly said, "They continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine;" in the all things surely, the apostles taught them to observe; "and in fellowship." Their attachment unto, and uniform profession of the doctrine, laid the foundation of their fellowship; and their *stedfast continuance* in both, was the glory of the primitive church. No toleration of opinion, different from the apostles' doctrine, is allowed the primitive converts; nor did they desire it. "They continued with one accord."—The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." From all which we draw this conclusion; the church of Christ set out upon the principle of unity in religious sentiment, profession, and affection, as the bond of fellowship; and the nearer any part of the church approaches to this order, in subsequent times, so much the more of the spirit and influence of the gospel of Christ, does it discover.

After the dispersion from Jerusalem, wherever the teachers of the gospel travelled, and planted churches, it was an object of their special care, to inculcate this steadiness, and uniformity among her members. Barnabas exhorted the converts at Antioch, "that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord." Barnabas and Paul confirmed the souls of the disciples at Lystra, and Iconium and Antioch, and "exhorted them to *continue in the faith*, and that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom." When, accordingly, certain men came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and brake the unity of the church's profession, by their *new light notions*! Paul and Barnabas withstood them, and had "no small dissention nor disputation with them." Upon their persisting to break the unity of the church's profession, the case was transmitted

to the Synod at Jerusalem, who made a decree upon the question, so full in proof of this great point.

Here then we come to combat the formidable objection. The former instances, it may be pled, did very well, when the church was of one mind, about Christ's *all things*; but cannot apply to the case of a divided church. When this happens, as it is impossible, in this imperfect state, for men to think perfectly *alike in all things*; is it not much more agreeable to the spirit of the gospel, and to the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ, to bear with one another in their different views, about things of less importance; than to oblige men either to separate, or become hypocrites?

I would say in reply, that the objection is a most severe reflection on the wisdom of our great Master. It was surely as "impossible for men to think perfectly alike in all things," when he gave the apostles their commission, as it is now; and yet he hath not provided in the least for such an impossibility. Either then the apostles must refuse such a commission, or they must become *hypocrites* in accepting it!—But perhaps he left it with his servants, to make provision for this inconveniency, whenever a case of diversity of sentiment should occur. Here is such a case, then; and let us hear how the rulers of the church, met in council, decide upon it. Never perhaps did a question come before any court of Christ, in which there were such danger of dividing upon it; and of consequence, where such strong reasons might be pled, for the expediency of passing an act of forbearance, as a principle of toleration in future. The Jewish converts were zealous of the rites of Moses. The Gentiles were extremely averse to submit to them; and a discussion, especially in the audience of Jewish spectators, must inevitably throw every thing in confusion. Forbearance too must be the more proper, as, in the judgement of many members of court, this affair in dispute is only a question about words, things of *inferior importance*, that is. But instead of this, these holy and zealous men for the truth, met the question fairly, entered compleatly into the merits of the cause, reasoned from the word of God [*and that happened to be the old testament!*] condemned these men for their conduct, and asserted and established the principle of unity in the church, in all its vigour. And which is still more remarkable, even although the sentence of the

Synod declared the Gentiles to be free from obligation to the ceremonial rites of Moses; yet, for the sake of unity in the body, and harmony among the disciples of Christ, they, in their decree, still retained certain restrictions upon the Gentiles, as terms of fellowship. From whence I would draw this necessary conclusion: that peace and harmony in the church of Christ are such very desirable objects, that even articles, about the propriety of retaining of which, some may have their *scruples*, ought rather to be retained, than kindle up the flames of contention, by moving and pressing an alteration. I speak as to a wise man, judge ye what I say!—"Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, ye must be circumcised and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment: it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if you keep yourselves ye shall do well. Fare ye well."

This decree, for the more perfect conformity of all the churches, was carefully circulated among them: and uniformity in doctrine and in profession was the privilege, and the study of these happy times.—You will surely not say of these men, as you say of our ancestors, that they had not clear views of the natural rights of man, and "of those principles of liberty, now universally current among us;" and yet they gave no more latitude to freedom of enquiry, than our ancestors have given.

Perhaps it may be said "that the articles of doctrine were but few. Whereas in latter times, the numerous errors, and various parties, into which the church hath been divided, have greatly multiplied the articles of the church."—Let us only recollect our Lord's commission to the apostles, and we must acknowledge they are far from being so few, as some would imagine. The Old Testament was the bible of the primitive Christians, containing all the doctrines in Moses and the Prophets, and the book of Psalms, concerning Messiah then come. Besides this, the exposition of ancient prophecy by the gospels, and the contents of the various epistles, as they were circulated among the churches, rendered the articles of the Chris-

tian's profession, even then, pretty numerous. But instead of increasing errors, giving occasion to tolerate diversity of opinion, in any thing which Christ had enjoined, it rather required the edge of truth to be directed, more steadily against that error, by a more frequent and full exhibition, of what the Spirit hath said unto the churches, in opposition unto it. But how could this be accomplished, if any of the teachers of the church were allowed, to entertain, or publish, diversity of opinion, respecting that, or any other part of the church's profession?—The church of Ephesus is commended by Christ for not *bearing* them which were evil: who held erroneous principles, as well as followed immoral practices. "And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not." The church at Pergamos "held fast his name and did not deny his faith." But wherein she tolerated the doctrine of Balaam, and of the Nicolaitans, he blames her, and calls her to repent. Thyatira is blamed for tolerating Jezebel. The church in Sardis is exhorted to hold fast *as she had received*. And to the church in Philadelphia, he saith, "Hold that *fast* which thou hast that no man take thy crown."

Paul, writing to his son Timothy, speaks of a "form of sound words," which he exhorts him to hold fast. Whether that was the formula then in use at ordination, I leave it to others to determine. But one thing is certain, whatever Paul taught Timothy, Timothy had orders, to commit to other faithful men: but with respect to articles of inferior importance, as matters of forbearance, we hear not a word about them. "The things which thou hast heard of me, among many witnesses, *the same* commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

The church at Philippi "were to stand *fast* in one spirit, with *one mind*, striving together for the faith of the gospel:" for all the truths received and professed by the church. All were to *strive together*. No toleration of diversity of sentiment! Alas, what came of the rights of conscience, of the rights of men here! And then he adds, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ; if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels, and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be *like minded*, having the same love, being of *one accord*, of *one*

mind." "Where to we have already attained," in belief and profession, "let us walk by the *same rule*, or canon, let us mind the *same thing*." He speaks of the "*acknowledgement* of the mystery of God, to the Colossians, and enjoins them to walk in Christ, rooted, and built up in him, and *established* in the faith, as they had been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you, through philosophy, and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of this world, and not after Christ." And this, I say, was his declaration above, "lest any man should beguile you with enticing words."—This is a most striking passage! and is perhaps as applicable to us, as if Paul were rising from the dead, and delivering such a charge in person, to the men of this generation. Very enticing words, about 'liberty of conscience, and freedom of enquiry,' which you know is the very soul of your new scheme, have been used to beguile many, and with too much success alas! our good Professor not excepted. This is a principal branch of the fashionable philosophy of the age, and vain deceit of carnal men, as contrary unto, and subversive of, the true spirit of the gospel of Christ, as that could be, to which our apostle here refers, and therefore there is equal need for us to beware of it.

Timothy hath express orders "to withdraw from any man who *consents not* to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ," be they fundamental truths, or not. But what need to withdraw, or to demand his consent to these, if a consent be not necessary, but men may 'agree to differ' about many of the revealed truths of God?—"We are to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.—We are to contend earnestly for the faith, once delivered to the saints." And because, as we have heard, several of the churches in Asia the Less fell from this rule, and tolerated opinions contrary to some articles of the faith, they were condemned on this account and severely threatened!!

Now, Sir, mighty as you are in the Scriptures, I challenge you to produce a series of examples, precepts, and exhortations, in their native, obvious, and unconstrained meaning, so decidedly in point, to prove the loose plan of association in fellowship, which you are so zealous of introducing. Blame me not then for using too strong language, although I pronounce your scheme, most unscriptural, ensnaring,

and eminently prejudicial, to the cause of Christ and of truth.

That God of his abundant mercies may open your eyes to see it to be so, and give you the humility and self-denial of acknowledging this, is the most fervent desire of,

Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

REVEREND SIR,

It is an observation by Volney the traveller, "that when an opinion is in vogue, every one discovers new proofs of its certainty." The case will perhaps be found to hold equally true, in an inverse proportion, when an opinion, or a truth, hath the misfortune of becoming unpopular. As the general dislike increases, every one thinks he discovers new absurdities in it. The advocates, accordingly, of 'liberty of conscience,' in the undefined use of these terms at present, and of 'freedom of enquiry,' imagine that scarce any axiom of Euclid can be more certain than these notions, and the principles of liberty upon which they are founded; and of consequence, every thing, that is suspected of curbing the operation of these principles, is instantly disgraced, and dismissed the service, with very little ceremony.

Repeatedly hath the church of Christ experienced the baleful consequences to the purity of the gospel, of adopting favourite maxims, or principles of philosophy, and arranging and explaining the doctrines of revelation, in consistency with them. The Arminians became so enamoured of their principle of liberty of will, that the freeness of grace in a sinner's justification was offered up to this Idol, and the Scriptures compelled to blaspheme, in testimony of the other points, which they thought consistency required them to maintain. The Socinian, in establishing his favourite principle, that all the doctrines of revelation are to be explained in consistency with the conceptions of human reason, hath been forced to abandon the leading arti-

cles of our faith, and our hope. And if 'liberty of conscience' is to be the principle, according to which the fellowship of Christians in the church of God is now to be modelled, then the beautiful uniformity and unanimity, enjoined upon her members in the Scriptures, and exemplified by them, in striving together for the faith of the gospel, must be lost. The toleration so necessary for the operation of this principle, must introduce a strange mixture and confusion of sentiment and doctrine, as far as that toleration extends; and as to discipline, as a guardian of the purity of doctrine, that of necessity is gone. To give the scheme a greater air of plausibility, and that it may take better with the bulk of mankind; an unscriptural distinction between the truths of God is instituted, and under the designation of less important, many articles of revelation must be sunk into degradation. And this is the native tendency of your favourite forbearance.

From the beginning to the 12th page of your Considerations, you have asserted the principle and sketched, as I think, the outlines of your "*new order of things*:" and the Magistrate's power, and obligation of our covenants, are fixed upon as the articles, for bringing it more easily into operation. This I scruple not to assert as my conviction; and in order to correct me, if mistaken, I request an explicit declaration if these be the *only* articles, about which you, and the rest, in your views, are at a loss? are you satisfied with every thing else, in that confession of faith, the copiousness of which seems not a little to vex you, especially with regard to young intrants into the ministry? or are these two articles only an opening unto farther alterations? —The introduction of a principle which may afterwards be carried such lengths, as the circumstances of the times, or the opinions of members of Synod, in the exercise of 'free enquiry,' may require? Should this last be the case, I hope I am acquitted of rash or harsh judging, in the declaration already made. The information required is surely very important, and perhaps absolutely necessary, to satisfy the bulk of the Secession how far the *harmless-like change*, may operate, in involving most serious consequences.

As to the two requests which you make of your brethren, and fellow Christians, before you consider the objections which you think may be offered to the alterations by forbearance, they are extremely reasonable and proper; only,

if you please, with a little amendment to the first. "Before they proceed a sentence farther, you request them to read and consider anew, the paragraphis in our standards which are the subject of debate." And for their accommodation you throw these paragraphs into a foot note. But, Sir, to have done justice to the memory of the compilers of these paragraphs, whom you so highly revere; to have done justice to the character of the Secession, as a religious body; to have done justice to the present controversy, and justice to your readers, you ought, I humbly apprehend, to have requested of them something more.—That they read and ponder the texts, in illustration or in confirmation, of these paragraphs.—That they inform themselves particularly, of the circumstances in which these men were placed:—condemned for disloyalty on the one hand, and pressed by a most formidable combination of Roman Catholics and High Church-men, on the other.—That they make one part of their principles to explain the sense, in which they understand another.—That they read apologies which have been written in their defence; particularly letters by our late Professor of Divinity, upon toleration.—That in a word, they carefully peruse the light, in which these things have all along been received and professed, by the Secession, in order that they may see the subject fairly, on both sides, to be better able to decide, with equity. But in the detached manner in which your foot note is presented, with your severe strictures upon its contents, in your progress, the mind, even of one pretty well informed upon the subject, could scarce escape conceiving prejudice against them: and no wonder although the minds of many have thus become prepossessed. But taken in this connected view, where is the cause for making the mighty noise and outcry, against these articles, which have been made?

As to the "solemnity of swearing by the great name of God" which is the second thing, you wish your readers to consider, I hope your *charity* will induce you to believe, that we desire to be as deeply impressed with this, as you can be. You will allow, besides, it is hoped, that those who have not seen the same cause for an alteration, nor are equally satisfied, as to the manner of alteration proposed, have, in no instance, discovered less reverence for the oath of God, than their brethren. Nay, Sir; it is because we fear an oath, by which you, and we, are both bound, to

"*assert, maintain and defend* all the doctrines in our confession, to the utmost of our power, against all *errors and opinions contrary thereto*," that we cannot go into your measures, till you satisfy us from the word of God, that it contains articles, contrary to that unerring standard. Do this, and we will renounce them immediately. Do this, and we will co-operate with you, to the utmost of our power, to forward reformation from error of every kind.

The 1st objection you suppose made to the proposed alterations is certainly very deficient as you have stated it, and whoever hath used it in this form hath not been aware of the advantage, which might be taken of it. "They," the articles in question that is, "have been already received, and therefore ought to be retained." But this, with your leave, is the fair state of the objection. "They have been already received as *agreeable unto the word of God and founded upon it*, and therefore ought to be retained, till upon mature and judicial investigation, they be proved to be wrong." The objection, according to this state of it, is certainly very strong. It would have given a new turn to your future reasoning, and prevented many unnecessary, and unjust reflections against your brethren. Nay, what surprizes me most, is your annexing such apposite Scriptures to the objection, and yet not perceiving the equity of stating it, in the manner, which hath been just now expressed. "Where to we have already attained we ought to walk by the same rule, and to mind the same thing.—We must hold that fast which we have, that no man take our crown. And having bought the truth, we must by no means sell it." These I should think much in point against your plan of alteration; and your business was certainly to endeavour to take off the force of them, or shew, by some apposite reasoning, that they could not apply in support of the objection. Instead of that, you fairly beg the question. You suppose the doctrine of the confession, about the Magistrate's power in religion, and the obligation of our covenants, to belong to the class of truths, which Christ never intended to be terms of communion in his church. But surely, supposition is one thing, and a satisfying proof, another; and without you prove this, the argument remains untouched. Your assertion, or the assertion of any man, is by no means an authority sufficient to establish a principle, which is the very point in dispute. Your distinction between truths which

ought to be terms of fellowship, and truths which ought not, we consider as both unscriptural and loose in the highest degree, in point of fair and solid reasoning; and till you define terms, enumerate, and arrange your articles; till you adduce your proof positive for these things, from the word of God; and then demonstrate that the articles in question are precisely of this description, the objection, I humbly apprehend, remains in all its force.

You tell us, indeed, that Paul "held fast in judgment and profession this article of Christian liberty, that men may eat any kind of food they please; but he did not hold it fast, as a term of communion."—And a good reason why, Because it was a thing indifferent in its own nature; and left so by the Holy Ghost: and if you prove the things in question to be of the same description, neither will we. But, as far as we can judge, this is a favour the public are left to expect of you, in some future production.

Here it may perhaps be proper once for all, to refresh your memory, and inform the reader, of some circumstances, which you certainly had forgotten, when you composed these Considerations, and the recollection of which might have saved you some labour. Don't you recollect, Sir, for you too were a member of the Synod's Committee; don't you recollect, that the first question, upon which the Committee divided, related to the measure of discussion and investigation, which one, unacquainted with the business, would think, from what you have said, we had resisted? And this, I know, is a circumstance which hath misled multitudes, in the opinion they have formed, and side they have taken in this business. We repeatedly declared, that we were as averse from retaining any thing that was not founded upon the word of God, as the most zealous advocates for change could be: and we say so still. We requested the articles in question to be tried by that unerring standard. We urged that the Committee proceed, in the first place, to explain, so as to ascertain how far these things were agreeable to the word of God: and if, upon due enquiry, any thing in the confession and covenants were contrary unto it, to say so in our report, that the Synod might say so to our connections, and to the world, and thus give a certain sound, upon the matter. Don't you recollect too, that some in your views strenuously insisted, that all discussion should be avoided, pressed forbearance as the previous

question, and, as you were the majority, you carried it accordingly. Thus all discussion was excluded. *Free enquiry*, at a time when free enquiry was so proper and necessary, for edification and mutual understanding of one another's views, was denied; and that too, by the warm advocates, for freedom of enquiry!

Some were at first amazed, at the aversion of members to an explanation. We were truly at a loss to ascertain the meaning of it. We had heard a great talk about *scruples*, and scruples concerning certain expressions in our standard books. It appeared therefore, to some, the best method of removing these scruples, either to convince the scruplers that they were in a mistake, or to make others scruple as well as they, so as to lead to some necessary explanation, if, after a fair discussion, it was found there were occasion for it. But when it appeared that a majority were against this, I could not help being impressed, from that moment, with what your Considerations fully warrant to say, *that, under pretence of scruples, the great object was a CHANGE in the terms of our Christian fellowship.*

Had we resisted all discussion, had we positively refused all amendment to the better, after, upon serious investigation, any part of our religious principles were found to be wrong; then perhaps you might have had some reason, for the strong things you so frequently say, against "making sinful vows and not retracting them;" against "suspecting an error and not making free enquiry into it;"—against "regarding our views in opposition to Christ's inviolable laws," &c. But when we requested an investigation, in order to determine how far there was reason for the alledged scruples, and to propose such alterations as the result would warrant, you certainly have greatly forgotten yourself, when you used such language, as if we had given occasion for such ungenerous insinuations. I am particularly hurt at the manner in which this part of the business hath been stated to the world, and wonder much, that although you had forgotten, some of your friends, who perused your manuscript, did not observe and correct the mistake. We think too, that in proposing to take up the business, in the manner the Committee rejected, we had most express scriptural example for our guide. Witness the conduct of the Synod of Jerusalem, upon which we have offered some remarks already. See p. 47.

OBJECTION II.

"The present ministers in the Secession are bound by their ordination vows to hold fast the articles in question." And don't you think they are, Sir, till they be proved to be wrong? There is certainly a great deal of weight in this objection. For, by your own argument, "those who have come under such engagements ought to be well assured that they are wrong, before they renounce them either *directly* or *indirectly*!" It is equally true and important, that "those, who have not yet taken the ordination engagements upon them, ought to consider maturely the nature of such engagements, before they take them upon them." If they be not satisfied, by all means let them act agreeably to their convictions; and turn to others, whose sentiments are more akin with their own. For that man can neither be happy himself, nor promise much happiness, and I will add, advantage, to others, who can take the oath of God, in support of a profession which he does not believe; in order to rank among the rulers, and have a voice in the ecclesiastical decisions of that religious association, so as to lend his aid in overturning it, as soon as opportunity offers. You know what similar conduct would procure him, in any civil society in the kingdom.

I am somewhat at a loss to perceive the intention of your next paragraph, page 17, near the foot, in which you very formally establish a truth, which none, I should think, would call in question: "That the vows of men are not to stand in opposition to the laws of Christ." You surely would never design by this, to make your readers suspect, that such as oppose the overture are in danger of going into this abuse. And yet it hath much of the air of such an insinuation.—In perusing your Considerations, this peculiarity in your manner has repeatedly struck me. When you are about to assert some new and uncommon opinion, in opposition to what hath hitherto been professed by us, it is commonly prefaced with some very pointed declarations, in favour of truths peculiarly acceptable and valuable. Such are the judicious remarks you have made concerning vows here. But let us mark the sequel!

Page 18. "It ought also to be observed, that no intrants into the ministry, or eldership, come under any vow, to

maintain every article in our Confession of Faith, as a term of communion, to be imposed upon all succeeding intrants." And you thus conclude the paragraph—"I see no reason, therefore, for the alarm that has been excited against the overture: for in departing from the things in dispute *as terms of communion*, there is no relinquishing of principle; as we were never called on to say, that they ought to be *terms*, but only that they are *truths*.—The distinction you introduce here is what I do not well comprehend. Is not every intrant, according to your own position, required to say before God, and to the church at ordination, that the doctrines in our subordinate standards are truths; and does not he come under a vow "to maintain, assert, and defend these truths to the utmost of his power, against all errors and opinions contrary unto them?" Being bound to commit these to faithful men also, must he not require the intrant that succeeds him, to do the same? This was surely the light in which Paul viewed the matter. 'The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same *commit* thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.' Thus the very nature of association and succession to office, as well as the preservation of purity in doctrine, requires, that the same vow demanded of me "to assert, maintain, and defend the truths of God, against all errors and opinions contrary unto them," I should demand of others, who are called to a similar service. You cannot, in consistency with duty, and your vow, admit men of contrary views, for you are bound to defend the truths you profess, to the utmost of your power; and therefore must be satisfied, by the same previous trials and declarations at ordination, of their soundness and friendship to all these articles that were demanded of you. What do you mean then, by asserting, 'that no intrant comes under a vow to maintain every article in our Confession of Faith, as a term of communion to be imposed upon all succeeding intrants?'

'In departing from the things in dispute as terms of communion, you add, there is no relinquishing of principle,' as we were never called on to say, that they ought to be terms, but only that they are truths!—This distinction is too nice for me. I am so dull, that I cannot perceive either the propriety, or justice of it. For if you be commanded to commit the same truths you have received

to faithful men, the moment you pass a resolution, that you will bear with any one, whatever be his sentiments concerning any of these truths; from that instant, you certainly relinquish principle. By such an act of forbearance, you oblige yourself to hear, without any uneasy emotion, or expression of blame, whatever shall be said by those in your fellowship, against the articles to which the forbearance extends. And is this no relinquishing of principle? Is it 'no relinquishing of principle, no renouncing of engagements, both directly and indirectly,' to agree tamely to listen to a brother, condemning any article which you pledged yourself, by oath, to 'maintain, assert, and defend;' and become bound, by that agreement, that you shall not contend with these contrary errors and opinions? Who sees not, that by consenting to your measure, principle must positively be relinquished? and yet you assert it is not. Those, who differ from you about the present or any other articles, must either be persuaded to accede to your views, and relinquish principle, or be guilty of violating their engagements, at ordination, in order to please and accommodate you; which is surely a thing you would condemn as much as I do.

I am truly sorry, you are at such pains, to impress your readers with the idea, that our Confession of Faith is a most bulky and unmanageable performance. "Considering the great number of articles in it, you think it no easy matter, especially for young men, to consider them all with so close attention, and to be so firmly established in the belief of them as scriptural truths, as to declare before God their firm belief of them. But they would need perhaps more than a *life-time* to examine the importance of them, before they could conscientiously promise, never to hold communion with any minister or elder who does not believe all of them without exception."—Forbearance respecting the extent of the magistrate's power, and the obligation of our covenants, can be no relief to you here!! Our fellowship is radically wrong, in your view, as long as office-bearers, with us, become bound by oath, to maintain the various articles in our Confession! By what you have said above, you excite prejudices in the minds both of young men and others, against a profession of adherence to all the doctrines of our Confession, in opposition to contrary errors. You give us reason to expect too, that when

you, and brethren in your views, try your skill in creed-making, we shall be favoured with a snug, little, portable Confession, incomparably more easy for young men to examine, and far safer for intrants to take, at ordination! But if you please, Sir, we will let the attempt alone; and satisfy ourselves with the Confession we have. For although I pretend not, to be either a prophet or a prophet's son, yet I will hazard a prediction here; upon the supposition our reforming brethren were to make the experiment, we would get one no better from them, and perhaps not so good, either for promoting the glory of God, or contributing to the edification of his church, notwithstanding all *the new light* we have got among us. Neither is there much need, Sir, for you to fright either our people, or students in Divinity, at our Confession, on account of its bulk, and the number of its articles. And as to its 'requiring more than a *life-time* to examine the importance,' &c. that depends much upon the length of the life. But understanding it, of the ordinary period of human existence, I cannot help differing most essentially from you; notwithstanding your professional station, and very superior knowledge. The investigation is doubtless most serious and important; and every intrant ought unquestionably to weigh and ponder every article, with the closest attention, previous to his submitting to the vows at ordination: but, by the blessing of God with a conscientious diligence, it does not appear to me at least, the very impossible thing, both to examine, and conscientiously to promise adherence to these, in opposition to all contrary errors, which you represent it to be. And pray, Sir, must all who have taken these vows, long before your objections were heard, have been such blind, implicit men, and so absolutely destitute of conscientious tenderness, as to swear adherence to they know not what, and live and die in a delusion? This is surely no great compliment, either to their head or their heart: and yet it is the native consequence of your strong assertion. The Secession, however, have been as distinguished for faithful, honest, intelligent and conscientious ministers and other office-bearers;—have been as harmonious, happy and Scriptural in the unity of sentiment, profession and affection among them;—the doctrines of the everlasting gospel have been as powerfully and plentifully preached; and its members as much refreshed, edified, and

comforted, by the labours of our predecessors, as they are now by ourselves; who, with our new discoveries, have become so very conscientious and scrupulous!

Besides, if young men would perhaps be more than a *life-time* in examining, &c. then the reason of changing the term promise in our formula into resolve, as was proposed in the overture, is obvious; and according to your views becomes absolutely necessary. *Resolve* respects the present conviction of the mind; but leaves the person somewhat at liberty to act otherwise according as he shall change his views. *Promise* implies an engagement more fixed and permanent.

According to what you have declared above, a change of our Confession becomes indispensably necessary. Creeds, Confessions and bonds of union if continued at all, must be reduced to a very few articles. Our unwieldy Confession must be stripped of all the mass of truth, which ought not to be terms of communion, and compendized into such an handy assortment of plain fundamentals, as will enable a young man conveniently to 'examine the importance of them, so as conscientiously to promise,' &c.

Thus the church will be blessed in future with a set of conscientious ministers; ministers, who will act conscientiously at least upon the day of ordination!—But, Sir, were you not aware of another consequence from your declaration, we have been examining? Did it never strike you that Deistical objections against the divinity of the Scriptures, and perplexing difficulties about them, are still more numerous than all the articles of our Confession, and perhaps as difficult for a young man to examine, with so close attention as the subject requires. Young men would therefore need perhaps more than a *life-time*, to examine the importance of all these objections, before they can conscientiously declare the Scriptures of the old and new testament to be the word of God, &c. And this you know is the first question of our formula.

OBJECTION III.

If expressed with a little variation, is one which, I confess, hath taken a very firm hold of my mind. I consider it as very dangerous, especially at this time, 'to recede from any part of our declared principles,' till judicially as-

certained to be contrary to the word of God, lest this be only the beginning of changes, both in fellowship and doctrine, by no means to the better. For according to your own remark, "if, without the most solid reasons, we make any change in our received articles of faith, we are like those women ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.—Inconstancy, when we can give no good reason for change, is certainly to be avoided." Now, Sir, it appears to not a few, that no good reason hath hitherto been given, for the changes you want, particularly for the manner, in which you would have these changes introduced. We have never seen your warrant from the word of God. Among all the quotations you have made, some are quite at a loss to perceive the shadow of an authority for dismissing these articles in question, especially in the summary manner you propose; till you demonstrate their contrariety to the unerring standard of all truth, or prove, that they belong to your secondary class of doctrine, which ought not to be terms of fellowship. To suppose or insinuate, as you have done, that this is the case, can be no good reason to any man. Thus to impose your views upon others, and then blame them for obstinacy, in not coming into them, so readily as you would wish, is approaching pretty near to the very evil of which you complain. 'Is discovering a greater regard to our own preconceived notions than to the word of God;' and I will add, than to the profession we have bound ourselves to maintain. The partial and covert manner too, in which measures have been brought forward, in this business; the loose way, in which innovations have already been made, have given just cause of alarm and excited serious apprehensions of the consequences.

How fond again, page 20th, to insinuate a resemblance between the Secession and the church of Rome, and to draw a comparison between the advocates for forbearance and the most distinguished reformers from the abominations of Popery! Luther and Zinglius, to whom you refer, had been connected with a most corrupted church, and therefore the more universally they unsettled received principles, they had better opportunity, of accomplishing reformation. But are the cases parallel, in the remotest degree, so as to warrant the same mode of procedure here? After a church hath arrived at a certain degree of soundness in the faith,

unity in fellowship, and Scriptural purity, and simplicity in worship, as I will venture to say the Secession hath attained, after all the faults you find with it, the greater the risk of unsettling received principles; lest by the attempt, you change greatly to the worse. Hence then the propriety and even absolute necessity, of sifting the undefined measures you propose, to the bottom, and of being duly aware of the consequences they involve. Nor ought a single step toward a change to be taken, till we see ourselves fully authorized from the word of God, that the change is Scriptural, and calculated to promote real reformation:—that unity in sentiment and affection are to be promoted by it, and the kingdom of Emmanuel advanced. Without such ends as these, it is certainly a risk too dangerous and great, to trouble the church, and excite the alarm you and your friends have occasioned, by any doubtful experiment.

You take occasion, from this objection, to present your reader with a considerable variety of considerations, in commendation of freedom of enquiry; and the zeal, with which you urge it, makes it obvious enough that you reckon the care hitherto used in the Secession, for preserving unity in the faith, and profession of her teachers, and members, very much calculated to check it. But, Sir, who, I beseech you, are the most consistent friends to freedom of enquiry?—those, who, upon scruples arising in the minds of any in our Synod, about the articles we profess, propose a fair discussion, in order to elucidate truth, and, if necessary, to explain the matter;—or those, who, although they say they scruple, avoid all discussion with the greatest caution, and by an hasty act of undefined forbearance, press upon us the adoption of a scheme, which we can by no means see, to be either expedient or Scriptural?

And here I beg leave to submit another remark upon your statement, concerning freedom of enquiry. Would it not have come with a good grace from a Calvinistic divine, and perhaps been indispensably necessary, from a Professor of Divinity, to have reminded his readers, of the veil that is naturally upon the minds of the children of men, with regard to spiritual things;—of the aversion of our hearts to retain God in our knowledge;—of the necessity of *spiritual illumination* to conduct such enquiries;—and of the great danger of pushing these, too far; or of being carried away by an itch of novelty, by a variety of specula-

tion, or mistaken views of genuine liberty, to alter and arrange the doctrines of revelation, rather to favour the creatures of our own vanity, than to preserve the understanding and conscience, in due subordination to the authority of revelation? Perhaps you do not apprehend any great danger on this head, and therefore judged such precautions unnecessary. But it hath strongly impressed the minds of others, that the present rage of change is not a little influenced, by an inattention to these very Considerations.

Let the word of God in its plain and native application be the standard, and Christian men be especially upon their guard against turning away their ears from the truth, and, in the vanity of their minds, 'turning unto fables,' and we court freedom of enquiry as much as you can do. Let the word of God be the standard by which the liberty of the conscience is to be bounded and regulated, and freedom of enquiry to be exercised; and we wish not, for a single moment, to retain an article, that upon due investigation is found contrary to that unerring rule. Let the word of God be the standard, and we dread not the most scrupulous scrutiny, if it be fair and candid. But what terrifies us is this, that, under pretence of free enquiry, '*of our own selves men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*' By all means let intrants into the ministry, and men called to the eldership and deaconship, bring all the doctrines and articles of faith unto the holy Scriptures, and be thoroughly satisfied, before ordination, that they are founded upon these. But after they have made the search, and, as an evidence they are satisfied, have pledged themselves to the church, and to the world, that these are the principles they will maintain and defend against all contrary errors, is there not the greatest need, to be especially upon their guard, 'that henceforth they be not like children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, and flight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive?' For I strongly suspect, certain principles, taught by the false philosophy of the age, and the late ferment about political liberty, have had too large a share, in exciting dissatisfaction in the minds of many, with our religious profession.

How much would it have contributed to the honour of the Secession to have allowed that tempest to have spent its

strength;—to have remained calm and undisturbed during the conflict;—to have exemplified a dignified superiority to the influence of political opinion upon religious profession! And if in any thing, our principles afforded reasonable scruples, that they were not exactly according to the mind of the Holy Ghost, let that be tried in a time of tranquillity, and when the public mind was least in danger of being misled, by the undue influence, of any notion of the day.

I am yours, &c.

LETTER V.

THE 4TH OBJECTION

Y ou suppose is "the respect we owe to our forefathers of the Seceſſion, or of the ſecond reforming period of the church of Scotland, as the reaſon why we ſhould make no change in the articles of fellowſhip which they approved."—And here you take occaſion to chaſtiſe, with a conſiderable degree of ſeverity, thoſe 'well meaning perſons' whom, in their attachment to our anceſtors, you compare to the followers of Mahomet, who upon his death, threatened to kill any man who ſhould ſay he was dead!—Thoſe 'vulgar! deſtitute both of ſenſe and conſideration.'—'Who think it a ſufficient argument of the ſoundneſs of any doctrine, or the rectitude of any religious obſervance, that they received it by tradition from their pious anceſtors!'—'The only argument in the mouth of many, whoſe zeal againſt the overture is very warm.'—'Thoſe bigots who ſhew a blind deference for the fathers, who ſeem to think that the ſentiments of our fathers ought to have the ſame influence on our judgments as a text from the Acts of the Apoſtles!' If this be your charity and moderation, Sir, I wonder what kind of language you uſe, when your charity ceases to operate, and indignation and wrath take the place of your gentleneſs and moderation! 'Truly our corrupt paſſions too readily diſpoſe us to judge haſtily concerning our opponents.' This ſurely is not the temperate language, you ſo warmly recommend in the firſt page of your Conſiderations. Where is the charity which ſuffereth long and is kind; eſpecially where it is difficult to

perceive any cause of provocation?—Allow me to say, you might have treated the people in our connection, with a little more gentleness and respect, than thus to hold them up, to the contempt of the public, for faults, which, if they really existed, your Master and mine has taught us to endeavour to remedy, in a very different manner. There can be no argument nor *illumination* in such hard names, whoever use them. And indeed, Sir, in speaking thus of the ‘vulgar,’ as you are pleased to design the common people, who are against your measures, you blame yourself: you blame us! why are they not better instructed? why are the *vulgar* who, for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or perhaps fifty years, enjoy all the advantages of a stated and regular ministry, so extremely destitute of sense and consideration? If they be the bigots, you represent them to be, surely those ministers must be greatly to blame, under whose inspection they are found. Whether there be any such *vulgar* about Selkirk, destitute of sense and consideration, you must know best. But I should have thought, your good sense and experience would have suggested a thousand methods of correcting these errors, and rendering the people better informed, than the one you have adopted.

The people with whom I have had occasion mostly to converse upon the subject, are perhaps of the class you call vulgar. They are not, by any means, of the most elevated rank in life. They are plain people, possessed of common sense, who have read their bibles, and make it their study, to understand the profession they have espoused. But I do assure you, I never heard any of them, plead the authority of their fathers, as their ‘only argument’ against your favourite overture. They will tell you what is extremely just, and none of us would be the worse of listening to its force a little more deliberately, that these doctrines and articles, in defence of which many, ‘eminently approved of God,’ submitted to imprisonments, and went with courage to the stake and the scaffold, ought not to be hastily given up by us; till they can be shewn, by very direct proof from the word of God, to be wrong. They ask, if our new light brethren, who are fondest of casting dust upon their memory, and have most to say against the covenants into which they entered, and against some of the doctrines for which they boldly contended, would go to a prison, would mount the scaffold, and embrace the stake,

with the same cool and unshaken magnanimity, in defence of their notions, about toleration, the rights of man, and of conscience, and against a professed belief of the obligation of our covenants, as they exemplified in their defence of them? They think that it is but a very small degree of respect they owe both to themselves and to their fathers, to give them at least a fair hearing. To respect their sentiments and examine them with much deference; and beware of rashly condemning, or rejecting what was the result of the united wisdom, and piety of that age, till upon the clearest evidence, the error be made manifest. Nay, if any part of their compositions in our subordinate standards be doubtful, or can admit of two interpretations, they think a regard to truth, and candour to their memory, as they cannot now reply in their own defence, require their sons, to adopt the most favourable. Neither can they perceive, how any can reject or undervalue any of the truths which they sealed with their blood, without saying, upon the matter, that these holy men died as fools die.

Besides, Sir, the people think they have something to say in the business, as well as you, before any change take place; and that they have a right to be previously satisfied, as well as their overseers. It was upon the express condition, of your declared attachment to the religious principles they profess, with a very solemn engagement to defend them against 'all contrary errors and opinions,' that they received you to be their ministers, and promised you subjection. Have they not then a better right to be heard, in favour of retaining the profession they enjoy, than any have to move an alteration, and without their consent, carry it against them? It therefore surprizes them exceedingly, that men, zealous for freedom of enquiry, and strenuous supporters of the cause of liberty, should so far forget their own principles, as to disregard the convictions of those, who wish to enjoy unmolested, what they have already attained; and confer a kind of monopoly of right of conscience, upon all who demand a change. If then, they are satisfied with the doctrine and plan of fellowship, they enjoy, not because their fathers adopted these, but because they believe them to be agreeable unto the word of God, and founded upon it, where is your warrant to change these upon them, and even employ discipline to compel them to submit to the change, till you convince them from the word of God, that

the change is proper? Notwithstanding all you have said, many remain unconvinced until this day; and implicit belief, upon the authority of any man, is no part of your system.

THE 5TH OBJECTION

You state and answer is "the great danger of a new breach in the Associate Synod from the introduction of the overture." And here you call "the men who cause divisions in the body of Christ, pestilences to the church and to the world, and say, they ought to be expelled from every Christian society." Amen, Sir! No man can deprecate more fervently a breach in our Synod than I do, nor think less of the men that cause division. The church of Christ is too much divided into parties, and opposing interests already; and great must be our guilt, if by our improper conduct, we shall be the instruments of increasing them! Should that melancholy event happen, which I pray God in his mercy to prevent, I should think, that neither you, nor the public, can in candour charge it, upon 'brethren on our side,' as you design us. To shew our desire to relieve the minds of scrupling brethren, we consented to a review of the formula, we pled for an explanation of the things which had occasioned scruples, if, upon investigation, an explanation was found necessary. We also acquiesced in the preamble, by way of explanation, if that would unite all parties, and none would strain the terms of it, beyond its plain and obvious meaning. But neither that has answered the purpose; and I cannot help thinking, the dissents by you and others, with the undue liberties taken by some, in consequence of that decision, have rendered the expedient abortive. The cleanliest and safest method would doubtless have been, as was then stated to the Synod, to retain the formula as it was and dismiss the petition: but, from a strong wish to accommodate brethren as far as we could, we acquiesced in the measure, although we doubted of its success. Nor will peace or harmony ever be restored, till all plans of alteration be abandoned, for the present, and the minds of members on both sides allowed to cool, and brethren, in their friendly intercourse, impart their light and views to one another.

Where then is the cause of saying the hard things against

us, you have said, when we have gone every length we consistently can, with a good conscience, to ease your scruples? We have consented to try every thing, except one, and that is a measure some will persist in opposing to the very last! namely your forbearance, because it is evidently intended to draw so deep in its consequences. And let me tell you besides, had this been as well understood, and brethren spoken out their intentions as plainly, at first, as your Considerations have done since, a review of our formula would not have been agreed to, with such unanimity.

The question now comes to you, and brethren in your views then; what will you do, in your turn, to prevent division and contention? Is not the call doubly loud upon you, who certainly have occasioned all this confusion, by your attempts to change the religious profession of a body, which, we had mutually pledged ourselves to one another, to support and defend, to abandon your project? Does not brotherhood, and equity, and Christian charity, and moderation, and consistency with your professions of liberty of conscience, call upon you to take no strong nor violent measures with your brethren, who are satisfied with things as they are? By petitions and remonstrances from every corner of the Secession against your scheme (and beyond all doubt they would have been still more numerous, had the tendency of it been better understood) the sense of multitudes hath been sufficiently expressed. Upon what principle of equity then, or of liberty, to adopt your favourite phrase, can you *force* your views upon a society, who have so publicly testified their aversion unto them, and burden the minds and wound the consciences, I shall suppose even of a very small minority, by compelling them to a change, when they cannot see the propriety of change? If there be liberty here, you are for securing to yourselves the monopoly, for those who oppose the change can enjoy none of it. You cannot be forced, you say, to abide by that profession you became bound by a vow to maintain: but you would force us to give it up; aye and before you have judicially investigated, or shewn to our conviction, that we are wrong. How must it astonish out of all measure the man who reads your pamphlet, and has heard the professions of moderation, and charity, by those in your views, to learn, that, under the plea of preserving Presbyterian

subordination, you have begun to cut off congregations* who cannot submit to you, in the changes you are attempting? Such strong measures are undoubtedly an outrage upon your profession, of liberty and moderation, and, with all your gentleness and charity, teach us what, were you to succeed in your attempts, we may expect! Who, Sir, are the men that cause division here? Does it not rest with you to withdraw the cause of dispute; to cease from any farther attempts to change; and both sides to express their sorrow, as well we may, for the evils that have happened? Let us satisfy the people under our inspection with a declaration of our attachment to what we profess, and strive together, to restore their confidence which is so much lost, and 'study the things that make for peace, and whereby one may edify another.' This appears to me the only effectual remedy, and the sooner it is adopted the better.

You urge very strongly the necessity of a separation, if the overture be not adopted. The overture is not adopted, and yet no separation hath been the consequence. Nor can any sufficient ground for separation on your side be shewn. The great argument by many, especially among their people, has been, that the alterations proposed were matters of no moment; mere trifles; and how unbrotherly it was, in any, not to yield in these few small things to their brethren! If then they be such trifles, the retaining them can be no great hardship either: and surely upon trifles, brethren would never separate from brethren. Besides, allowing them to have been trifles formerly, yet in as much as our peace and unity depend upon retaining them now, they have become matters of considerable magnitude. Had we seen the change to have respected mere trifles, some of us would have given you no disturbance in effecting it: but it appeared very different from the beginning, and every day's discoveries increase its magnitude.

You pass over, page 30. in a very cursory manner, a circumstance of very considerable importance; and that is, "if members of Synod have such views of any part of our

* Burntshields and Old Aberdeen are examples of this; and although, in several things, they were perhaps not to be justified, yet the examples made of them because they could not submit to change, renders their case a common cause. Allowing they had been very irregular and even unreasonable, why not endeavour in 'meekness to instruct them that *oppose* themselves' and ply every method, to gain or convince them, rather than proceed to such an extremity?

profession, why did they not leave our communion long ago?" and I will add, how could young brethren, with honour and honesty, take vows at ordination to maintain these things, if they be so noxious to them now, that, if they be retained, they must separate? If a separation be necessary now, the call was doubly loud not to connect at first. 'No man can detest more than I do the hidden arts of dishonesty;' and therefore to avoid all such appearances, it is necessary, particularly for late intrants into our body, to testify, for some time at least, a respectful adherence to the principles of that body which they have vowed upon oath to maintain: and as to the rest, who have had time to see matters differently, from what they saw at ordination, and yet have remained for some time past, without making any attempts to separate, why not exercise this *moderation* a little longer? especially as some of them have positively declared, that to retain the formula as it was would give them no uneasiness!

But now they have declared their sentiments,—and so they have, although it would have been much better they had not: or, immediately upon doing it, to have left the body, and resigned their charges peaceably. But since they perceive mischiefs to arise from the attempt, they did not apprehend, is not that a sufficient reason for them, notwithstanding their declaration, to desist? and I would hope, upon calm reflection, and more mature investigation, sentiments and views adopted and asserted, during the present ferment, would be found unscriptural, and abandoned.

"Brethren on your side, you tell us, are required neither to make, nor to impose any professions contrary to the dictates of their own minds; and therefore no necessity is laid upon them, to depart from the communion of their brethren." This argument, although in the mouth of every one who pleads for the change, appears a kind of paradox, at least to me. Have we not uniformly declared it to be contrary to the 'dictates of our minds,' to adopt forbearance as a remedy, in a case that hath never undergone a judicial investigation, so as to ascertain the disease? Is it not contrary to the dictates of our minds, under the unscriptural distinction of essential and circumstantial, imperceptibly to change the principles of our Christian fellowship, without apprising the community of this; or by a direct appeal to the holy Scriptures, furnishing us with un-

doubted evidence of your divine warrant?—Is it not contrary to the ‘dictates of our minds,’ to go along with you, in a scheme of such doubtful experiment, and be the occasion of stumbling to so many of the godly in our communion?—Is it not contrary to the ‘dictates of our minds,’ aye and of your’s also, considering what you have said about the *solemnity* of an oath, to become bound at ordination to ‘maintain, assert, and defend, to the utmost of our power,’ the system of revealed truth in our Confession and Catechisms, against all errors and opinions contrary thereto, and yet give our consent to a principle, and a measure; for admitting men of various views with regard to I know not, how many things in our Confession, and Catechisms; and so bewilder the poor Christian people, with opposition of doctrine, by those whom they call to break the bread of life among them? Say no more then, I intreat you, ‘that we are required neither to make nor impose any profession contrary to the dictates of our own minds!’

Is it not somewhat remarkable to hear you employ as an argument for your present measures, an anxiety not to ‘discourage others from seeking admission into our communion,’ while you can press your plan even to the cutting off of those, who, for many years, if not all their days, have been in it already? To have been consistent here, was it not indispensably necessary to exercise the utmost care, and exemplify the most unruffled patience, and tenderness, and meekness, in order to avoid offence to a single individual, or drive, what you may reckon, the weakest of our flocks from our fold?—And whom would you *discourage* even although you continue to require an unlimited assent to the Confession of Faith as formerly? It could not be people from the Establishment for that is required of all office-bearers with them as well as with us; and we hear of no complaint of that as a grievance. It could not be any from the Relief, for they have never, as far as I know, made that article an exception either. It could not be the people of the Reformed Presbytery; for they have no objection to all the power ascribed to him in our Confession, if he were one taken from among his brethren. Nor can it be brethren from the other side of the Secession, for that is not the point of difference between us. Except Independents, &c. &c. I am at a loss to perceive whom you would discourage by retaining matters as they are.

As to separation, if matters should be driven to such an extremity, and you endeavour to carry your congregations along with you, I appeal to yourself, if in the event of renting congregations and families, destroying friendships and breaking the relation between pastors and people, the argument be not all against you. We can with great propriety say to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers, 'it was upon your professed attachment to what we still maintain, that the relation between you and us was originally instituted. We are the same in our sentiments and profession we were when you took us by the hand, and welcomed us among you as your spiritual guides. If therefore you are for change, you would do well to be very sure you have the authority of God in his word to warrant the change; lest, in hastily breaking the relation between us, you be offending God, and the charge of causing division attach unto you. No fickleness nor disposition toward new untried schemes, on our part, hath provoked you to this; and therefore it is not because you disagree with our ministry, but have fallen out with your own profession, that you go away.'—You, however, and your brethren, can employ no such plea. You can have no such claim upon the consciences of your people, to carry them along with you, according to the alterations you may think it proper to make, in what you once assured them was the profession of your faith, as well as theirs. Nor can you, in consistency with that 'freedom of enquiry' you recommend, do any more than leave it with the people to judge for themselves, without employing any farther influence to bring them over to your views. Nay, the favourite principle of freedom of enquiry obliges your friends to be just as zealous and active to circulate the present statement, for example, in reply to your Considerations, as they were in dispersing your Considerations at first: at least, that they should restrain their animadversions, that no undue influence, on one side, may pervert judgement. How far this regard to principle will be exemplified the event will declare.—But would it not be ten thousand times better, to drop your scheme, and never put the validity of all these reasonings to the proof?

But since we must talk about separation, and the unhappy circumstances that have brought matters to such a crisis, the most unpleasant consideration still occurs to one's mind.

which cannot fail to give great uneasiness and offence; and that is, that profelytes should have been still making to these views, and the Secession at large kept in such profound ignorance of it. Never, for example, till your Considerations appeared to the world, was it known or suspected, by the bulk of our community, that their Professor of Divinity avowed sentiments so contrary to that church, whose youth he was training for the ministry. Did not integrity, and equity, and consistency, require far more early intimation of such a circumstance? It amazed not a few in the Secession, for years past, that there hath been such a change of sentiment among our preachers, and students in divinity; but upon the appearance of your Considerations, the amazement ceased. It is extremely natural for a disciple to be fond of his master, and even partial to his favourite views; and in the present instance experience hath proved the truth of the observation. But where is the safety of any church, if she have one profession, and her divinity instructor, being of another, shall continue to train up youth for the ministry, according to his views?

With regard to your remarks respecting Arminianism and Arminian errors, page 31st and afterwards, in order to shew the odiousness of persecuting principles, I wish you had not made use of them; lest some readers, mistaking your meaning, should reckon Arminian errors not so contrary to the word of God, as they certainly are. Or lest any should suppose you entertain sentiments favouring, in any particulars, the cause of Arminians. Neither is there any force of argument, in stating their numbers, as an objection against the Magistrate's power to proceed against them, if he possess that power; or in telling us what one out of a thousand would *think* upon the subject. A Magistrate may possess many powers which, in the circumstances in which he is placed, he cannot, nor would it be prudent in him, to exercise: and he may have powers which multitudes may *think* he has not. Still that is no argument against the power he possesses.—Your sixth and seventh objections pages 32.—35. will fall under review, in a more advanced part of your performance.

But, Sir, these are by no means the only objections to the forbearance you urge. Often has it been said, and we say it again, why condemn any article in our profession, till it be proved to be wrong? Never as a court hath the

Synod looked near these disputed articles. Some out of door reports; some information of scruples concerning them; Mr. Dick's Sermon, and your Considerations in favour of the overture of forbearance have excited strong prejudices against them.—But are these sufficient to warrant you to sentence a man either to banishment or death? Why then pass a sentence, amounting at least to banishment out of your creed, upon certain articles, which have never been tried? I can enforce this objection with nothing so much in point, as with a few observations by yourself. Page 52.

“If we were sitting in judgement upon a man for his life,
 “no consideration would induce us to give our voice against
 “him, till we had seen with our own eyes, that he is really
 “guilty of the crime charged upon him, and that the crime
 “justly exposes him to death. Nothing would be taken
 “upon *trust*. The rules of *legal evidence* would be care-
 “fully followed. If we depended on the opinion of the
 “*wisest man* on earth, in such a case, rather than our own
 “judgement, would not the guilt of blood haunt us all the
 “days of our life? Would we not shudder at the thoughts
 “of that account which we must give, of all our actions,
 “to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead?”

—Now, Sir, out of your own mouth comes forth the confession. Neither the Committee's overture, nor Mr. Dick's Sermon, nor your Considerations, are sufficient to warrant the expulsion of these articles from our formula, ‘till the rules of *legal evidence* be carefully followed.’ ‘*Nothing is to be taken upon trust.*’ All your pains then to expose these, and I am sorry, you have shewn such good will, are lost, except in so far as they excite prejudice in the public mind against them. For till the rules of *legal evidence* be carefully followed by the Associate Synod, your forbearance becomes a most unnecessary, and unwarrantable measure.

Besides, granting all you alledge against the power of the civil Magistrate, and the obligation of our covenants to be true, yet how comes forbearance to be either a scriptural, or a rational remedy? Much as has been said to prepossess the minds of Christians against these articles, I should be glad to know how forbearance is either a vindication of truth, in this instance, or an exposure of error. If there be an error in our subordinate standards, in these points, you are for allowing it to continue; and forbearance is your act of indulgence for men to persist in these errors. What

is this, but a manifest injury, both to the present and succeeding generations? Their spiritual instructors, will men say, have scrupled, about the truth, or importance of certain articles they profess, and their Divinity Professor has published such Considerations, concerning them, as are calculated to prejudice the minds of all who read them, against these articles; and yet they are allowed to remain, with all the errors they are supposed to contain; and men are still permitted to teach them, if they please, without any blame attached to the propagation of these errors. I can see no purpose, forbearance respecting these articles would serve but one. And that is; that such a sentence would be an indirect acknowledgement, that these errors really exist in our Confession and Covenants. In proportion as this opinion prevails, and these defects remain, so will the credit of these subordinate standards sink. As the instances of forbearance in other points increase, their credit will sink still lower, till at length, matters be ripened for dismissing the Confession altogether. I will not say, you had such a process as this in contemplation; but I appeal to yourself, if this be not the native tendency of the forbearance for which you plead.

But supposing you got your will, and forbearance were adopted, let us see how it will operate. It must either operate as an agreement by the members of Synod, that neither side shall speak at all, nor teach at all, his particular views upon these two points; and so, instead of liberty, become a most unhallowed constraint, to conceal part of what is still considered by us as the council of God.—Or, which is perhaps nearer the intention of it, it is meant to be an agreement, to find no fault with one another, whatever be their views, or their doctrine, upon these two points; or upon any other points, to which forbearance shall afterwards be extended. The obvious consequence is, that from that moment, the Secession admits two sets of preachers into her community: and, from what hath happened in other churches, the transition of forbearance in these two points will extend insensibly to others, without the formality of an act of Synod granting the extension: and thus, the plague once begun, it will be impossible for you to stop it.

Let me put a case here. Two ministers of opposite views are colleagues in the same congregation, or, which

must often happen, are assisting at the same communion, and succeed each other, in the same tent, or pulpit. The one asserts his views, concerning the power of the magistrate about religion, or about the obligation of the covenants, &c. The other succeeds him; and in stating his views, flatly contradicts every thing he has said. The one however hath asserted his privilege of toleration, and so hath the other; and the deed of Synod is a protection to both.—But the poor Christian people, who have been the hearers, what becomes of them? One of their instructors hath taught them one thing, on the same subject, and the other hath taught another. What are they to do, in such an opposition of doctrine? Are they to believe either, or to discredit both? This is their unhappy dilemma. Their souls are subverted. Their faith is shaken. They are tempted to suspect such a thing as a reality in religion, when ministers, in the same body, are thus opposed to one another in religion. And must not the case be the same, with respect to all the other non-important doctrines which you would be for excluding, from the class of terms of fellowship?

As to your positions, “that the doctrines we profess may be all sound, yet ought not to be terms of communion.—That they may be truths, and yet not of the importance of being terms of fellowship.—That men may agree to differ without violating the bonds of charity or of church-communion,” they are certainly very opposite to the doctrine of the church to which you belong.—I may be wrong, Sir, but it appears to me a very unscriptural kind of charity, to tolerate a brother in any error. If he be wrong, by all means endeavour to put him right, and in doing so, you perform one of the kindest offices of a brother. And for what purpose is the church called the pillar, and the ground of truth, but that her public creed should contain such a summary of what her head hath laid down in his word, for directing the faith, and regulating the practice of all her members; that none shall be tolerated; to avow or disseminate any thing contrary unto these?

A private individual may be ignorant of many doctrines of the gospel which the church, to which he applies for admission, professes. And yet provided he avow no error contrary to her profession; but declares himself willing to receive farther instruction, such an one, ‘weak in the faith,’

is to be admitted. But the case is different, with respect to those who are to be the instructors of others. They are supposed to be so well informed, concerning the various articles of our holy religion, as they are professed in the part of the church to which they offer themselves candidates, as to satisfy her office-bearers concerning both their belief of all her articles, and thier soundness, in entertaining no sentiments contrary to these. And is not this the meaning of Paul's rule, when he commands 'office-bearers first to be *proved* concerning the mystery of the faith?'

After, then, such a voluntary agreement on the part of the candidate, and solemn trial and admision on the part of the church, with a public and deliberate pledge of himself to the church, and to his fellow-labourers, in the immediate presence of God as the witness of the whole; I cannot help thinking, that conscience, duty, honour, modesty, deference, and a variety of other considerations, should make him very diffident of admitting any peculiar notion, in opposition to his avowed profession, and still more cautious, about troubling the church with it. But if it so far press upon his conscience, that he can no longer conceal it, all men will be convinced it is *indeed* conscience with him, only by the peaceable, orderly, honourable, open, grave and tender manner, in which he proposes his difficulties! He will study such a line of conduct, as to give least offence to those with whom he has walked together in fellowship. Nor will he press his peculiarities upon the people of his charge, in opposition to what he was ordained by the church to teach, according to her creed, in order to 'draw away disciples after him.' This is such a violation of candour, and of good order, that no man, of real tenderness of conscience, will allow himself to practise such low dissimulation: and whoever shall be guilty of it, his plea of conscience, must be very little regarded, by every conscientious and sensible man.

As to the use of the term forbearance in Scripture, of which you, and brethren in your views, are so extremely fond, at present, we wish for nothing more, than a candid and impartial investigation of this point. Upon turning up the Concordance, I find the term occurring not very frequently in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, it hath not the remotest allusion, in its different occurrences, to the religious fellowship of that dispensation. In the new,

all the instances put together, will not 'afford a *clear and indisputable* proof,' of it's application to the use you and your friends intend by it; and of consequence, upon your own principle, ought not to be adopted. I can find it occurring only in five places, and shall adduce and examine each, in it's order. Rom. ii. 4. 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and *forbearance*, and long suffering.' Rom. iii. 25. 'To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the *forbearance* of God.' In both these places, the term is evidently designed, to express the patience of God, in delaying to inflict upon sinners, the judgements which their sins deserve: but no man will infer from hence, a toleration from God to sin, because he delays for a time to punish.—Eph. vi. 9. Masters are exhorted to forbear threatening. The original word is a different one, from that used in the two former instances, and might be rendered leave off threatening, or let it alone.—2. Tim. ii. 24.—The servant of the Lord, among other qualifications, must be patient. Your better skill of the language will perceive, that the Greek verb, commonly rendered forbear, occurs there in a compounded state with the noun signifying evil. And it might perhaps be rendered, the servant of the Lord must *bear up under evil*. But no one would infer from hence, a licence to bad men to persevere in doing him evil.—The only other place of its occurrence is Eph. iv. 2. 'Forbearing one another in love.' This appears to me the only instance of occurrence, in which, with the least shadow of plausibility, it can be urged as an example of its use, in church communion. It will require a considerable degree of accuteness and ingenuity, however, to make this evident to any unprejudiced mind. Some translators of the Scriptures render the term in this place, supporting one another. But whether this, or the ordinary translation, be given as the meaning, the connection fixes its application, rather to the offices of kindness, and of forgiving of injuries, between private Christians, than to the exercise of mutual toleration among office-bearers, respecting any point, or points of doctrine. "I beseech you," says Paul, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called.' That is the general exhortation, and it hath a direct reference to the practice of private Christians. In the next verse, the general exhortation is applied to particulars. 'With all lowliness, and

meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love: either supporting one another with offices of kindness, or in love forgiving and overlooking the injuries, one may have done another. Endeavouring thus to preserve that holy unity, in consequence of being all one in Christ Jesus, by the agency and inhabitation of the Spirit, which is so strongly cemented, by the diligent cultivation of whatever shall make for peace among Christian brethren. This seems to be the natural, and unforced meaning of the passage.

‘But is it not as evident that forbearance is here recommended respecting articles of doctrine, in order to prevent divisions in the church?’ Then you must understand the exhortation in the 3d and subsequent verses, to respect doctrine also. And if you endeavour to keep that unity, respecting doctrine, which the Spirit so uniformly recommends in his word, and study to maintain peace, always in consistency with the unity of the system of truth, knowing that there is but one body, &c. &c. you will not have so much use for forbearance, in point of doctrine, as you would have us believe. Nor does it appear, that the Holy Ghost designed this application of the term here.

‘But does not Paul professedly write upon the article of forbearance, in church communion, Rom. xiv. and bestow a whole chapter upon the subject.’ That is most readily granted. And I will also ask you in turn, does not Paul specify the *articles*, about which the forbearance is to be exercised? Things *indifferent* in their own nature, and about which the Holy Ghost hath given no deliverance to his church in his word, are the true and proper objects of forbearance. By express revelation from heaven, the ceremonial law had been declared, to be no longer a wall of separation, between Jew and Gentile. But no where had the Holy Ghost declared it to be a sin, in a zealous few, still to observe it; and therefore he was tolerated in these observances. How that can be pled as an example to us, in this remote period of the church, is what I cannot understand, except in so far as forbearance respects things indifferent in their own nature, although you, and some of your friends, have made great use of it to prove that men must be allowed to think differently upon many points of religion. No man, I grant you, has a right to press his private opinions, his peculiar notions, upon his brother: nor to urge him to think, as he thinks; except he can shew

the authority of Christ speaking in his word. In this case, both are bound to submit their understandings, their imaginations, their high thoughts, to the obedience of Christ. But neither is warranted, from his word, to tolerate the other, to think, or publish, sentiments, different from the mind of Christ; particularly if they be in the relation of church members, and that part of the church hath so far attained, as to profess the mind of Christ in the matter.

Thus I have attended to the objections you suppose against the overture, and the answers you have given to them; I have endeavoured to shew that forbearance is no remedy to the evils apprehended, in the principles we profess: I have inquired into the use of the term, in the holy Scriptures, and cannot find the shadow of evidence, of its ever been exercised in the days of the apostles, in the communion of the church, except in things indifferent in their own nature, or left so by the Holy Ghost. Is not the conclusion from hence irresistible, that we have no warrant from Scripture, for the adoption of forbearance, as a principle of fellowship in our present circumstances?

That the happy time may soon arrive, when 'all the watchmen of Zion shall see, eye to eye, and sing together with the voice,' is the earnest desire of,

Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER VI.

REVEREND SIR,

IN former Letters, I have discussed what I principally intended, by way of reply to your Considerations; and shall be the shorter on what is to follow. It is not my design, to attempt any defence of our Confession and Covenants respecting the articles in dispute, both as we are bound to sustain them to be right, till, by a judicial investigation, our supreme Court shew evidence, that they are wrong; and because they have been so well defended long ere now, by others, particularly by our late Professor, in his Letters upon Toleration. Besides, you had stated the question you meant to discuss, respecting the doctrine in our Confession, only with reference to the relative importance of these points, as terms of fellowship in the Christian church, without declaring them to be either right, or wrong. Of consequence, you make no formal attack, although your unfriendly views be abundantly obvious, from the indirect hints you so often throw out.

I am happy at your 'cheerful confession, that unless sufficient arguments can be given for alteration, no alteration ought to be made.' You have produced five arguments, and they appear, to me at least, neither separately, nor together, by any means sufficient to warrant alteration, particularly the alteration you propose.—Let us hear them in their order.

Argument first. "If the Confession of Faith give Magistrates a power about sacred things, which the Scripture does not clearly warrant, neither the Confession of Faith,

nor Covenants, ought to have place in our articles of communion, without an exception of the article in question." —But why your *Ir*, Sir? You might as well have come openly forward, and stated the question fairly. Is it either consistent or candid, first to tell us the question was not, 'whether the Magistrate has all the power which is ascribed to him in our public standards;' and yet adduce as the very first argument, in support of the state you propose, such a broad insinuation of the very thing, you declined making the subject of enquiry? Why beg the question? Why take the thing as granted, which ought to have been proved? You know very well, that it is not your *if*, nor the *if*, or even authority of all the members of Synod, in their out of door assertions, that can be sustained as valid objections, against either this, or any other part of our Confession or Covenants, while, as a church, we profess adherence to these, without exception. We are perfectly agreed, that 'creeds ought to be purged of every thing that hath the appearance of being unsupported by Scripture;' only articles are by no means to be exploded because individuals think so, till according to Scripture the church can make it *appear* that it is so. An opportunity was offered you in the Committee of Synod, to state and discuss this very point; but you were one of those who declined it. To act thus, when discussion might have been so satisfactory and salutary; and soon after, publish complaints and severe animadversions to the people, upon these very articles in dispute, to recommend forbearance, as a term of fellowship, will tempt some I am afraid to look upon this as something else than 'the wisdom which is from above.'

You state in pages 36. 37. and 38. a great many problematical questions concerning the Magistrate's power about religion; and when you come to the example of the kings of Israel and Judah, we are like to lose you, in the cloud of dust you raise, about 'a change of the priesthood inferring a change of the law;' and the kings of David's family being typical of our blessed Lord, and special duties being incumbent upon them, by the peculiarity of that dispensation." And yet after all, you add, 'I do not say, that Christian kings have not the same right, or are not bound by the same obligations, as the Jewish kings.' What I say is, that it may partly be accounted a difficult point to determine, whether they have the same rights, or are bound

by the same obligations.' The inference from hence is plain. Since you are thus in the dark, upon this point yourself, it will be better to continue things as they are, till you become better *illuminated*.

You alledge, page 38. that the crime of heresy came not within the compass of the criminal code of Moses, 'else the Jews would have accused our blessed Lord rather with heresy, than with blasphemy, when he called himself the Son of God. The Pharisees, you add, hated the Sadducees, who were certainly heretics in our sense of the word, &c. but they never seem to have dreamed, that the law appointed force to be used, for compelling them to change their opinions.' I cannot help thinking, that according to the Jews' opinion of our Lord's making himself equal with God, that supposed crime came under the charge of blasphemy, rather than of heresy. And with regard to 'the Pharisees not employing force against the Sadducees,' it is extremely probable the doctrines of the Sadducees were not openly avowed by them, till they were so powerful, that the force of law could not be employed against them. In our Lord's time, they seem to have had the places of chief distinction, and authority, in the Synadhrim, and therefore, although the Pharisees might dream their dream they durst not reveal it.—But upon our Lord's apostles beginning to preach 'the words of this life,' the High Priest, we know, and all they that were with him, (being of the sect of the Sadducees!) prosecuted them and punished them, as heretics, and schismatics. We are sure from Paul's own defence, that he was persecuted for heresy. Hence are these remarkable words: 'But this I confess, that after the way which they call *heresy*, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law, and the prophets.' Thus Paul, in repelling this charge, gives us a view of his sense of heresy. It was to believe and publish what was contrary to the law and the prophets. And instead of alledging that there was nothing in their law to warrant such a prosecution, a circumstance which this able pleader would scarce have overlooked, he admits the right of law; but pleads not guilty of the charge. I question much, therefore, the justice of your remark, 'that, in the whole of the Jewish history, secular arms were never thought fit to be employed, for suppressing the errors of any of the Jewish sects, who were not found in the faith.'

It is not part of my plan, to reply to the very loose remarks you have made, upon the proofs from Artaxerxes, Herod, &c. &c. pages 38. 39. 40. Nor to answer all your questions, under this argument: although I have the presumption to think, a reply here not very difficult.

All you have to say against the Magistrate's power evidently originating from your extreme jealousy, about the rights of conscience, I shall collect your principal observations upon this, as they are scattered in the different pages of your pamphlet, and take the liberty of submitting a few remarks upon them. You speak of "the unalienable rights of man to judge for himself in matters of conscience.—Liberty of conscience.—Notions of toleration that are now so common.—As the principles of toleration are now almost universally approved, it is not to be supposed that many will decline our communion, for leaving out every thing that favours of intolerance.—Our venerable ancestors had not clear views of the natural rights of men" &c.—Notions of toleration I grant you are very common, and its principles very generally approved; but is that any reason for us to adopt them; till we be satisfied from the Scriptures of truth, that they are approved by the Holy Ghost? We had need to beware, Sir, lest an undue solicitude, to accommodate the principles of our profession, to the loose notions of the age, be the rock, upon which we founder, a most excellent cause. Before the *natural rights of men* were so well understood among us, we were eminently distinguished, for the purity and harmony of our doctrine, as a religious body. How dismal and destructive will the change be, if by an excessive fondness to study, and to guard these *ideal* rights, men among us shall depart from the purity of the gospel, either because they have not studied it, with sufficient care, as a beautifully connected system; or reckon it inconsistent with their notions of liberty, to entertain and inculcate the same sentiments with their brethren, in conformity to the various parts of that system!

The phrases "unalienable rights of man to judge for himself in matters of conscience.—Natural rights of men," would require to be well understood by us, and their import very accurately ascertained, from the word of God, before we indulge in the use of them. All the rights men possess must certainly flow from God. Men of consc-

quence can possess no rights, either natural, or unalienable, contrary to God's revealed will. Every judgement he forms contrary to this, must be an usurpation of rights which do not belong to him. Conscience being God's witness, and God's agent, in the soul of man, possesses no rights but what it enjoys from God; and of consequence, can do nothing *against* the truth, but for the truth! The liberty of conscience, the toleration, and rights of men, for which you seem to plead, appear to me, to rest upon this principle, that, in these articles about which you insist for toleration, men are independent of the authority either of the church, or state. Nay independent of the authority of God in his word, upon these articles. For he certainly intended one precise meaning to what he hath revealed, in his word. If then the church, in her office-bearers, as invested with power from her head, profess she understands the mind of the Spirit in these articles, how can she, without violation of her trust, grant a toleration to her members, to entertain sentiments, in opposition to these? It is impossible she can, without declaring, that her head hath given no deliverance upon these, or left it as a matter indifferent, how men shall think, or teach concerning them.

You will readily grant, that conscience is as much injured by the grand apostacy, as any other faculty of the mind. By means of this, the conscience is defiled, is seared, is perverted, is blinded; and by means of an evil and an erring conscience, men depart from the truth. Such a conscience must inevitably lead men to their own destruction, if they be allowed to follow its dictates. To assert an unalienable right to man, in these circumstances, 'to judge for himself in matters of conscience,' appears to me, to be near akin, with asserting the *natural liberty* of the mad-man; who, if his fetters were broken, would destroy himself. The conscience, that judges or acts, contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, is an erring, is a guilty, is a perverted conscience. The man, who would plead for toleration to such a conscience, must be an enemy both to God and man.—An enemy to God in demanding liberty for his rebel to prosecute the ends of his rebellion.—An enemy to man, in flattering him with the notion, that it is liberty, to think or act contrary to any part of God's revealed will. 'We can do nothing

against the truth, but for the truth,' and therefore have no right to grant such a toleration.

The church of Christ being the 'pillar and ground of the truth,' by the public profession which she makes, of the various truths, revealed in the holy Scriptures; when I am admitted a member, still more, when I am ordained as a teacher, I declare my satisfaction with every truth she professes, because founded on the word of God, with the submission of my conscience, as well as understanding, to the authority of Christ speaking in his word, in support of that profession. You know best, whether such a subjection of the conscience and understanding of individuals, either of member or teacher, to the wisdom and authority of the rest, as guardians of the truth professed by the church, in all its parts, be not meant by that saying of the apostle, 'The spirit of the prophets,' or, as it is sometimes rendered, the doctrines of the prophets, 'are subject to the prophets.' The doctrines which they profess, or which they, in the exercise of their understanding, and conscience, prepare to teach others, are subject to the prophets. The consequence is obvious. If, in their free enquiry, they shall adopt any thing, contrary to the faith of the gospel, their liberty, in this respect, instead of toleration, shall be checked, restrained, and corrected. And if any shall persist in the exercise of such unhallowed liberty, they shall be cast out of the fellowship of the church. Of all these things our ancestors have discovered as just, if not more just, views than we have done.

If, however, a rage for greater liberty of conscience shall prevail upon any part of the church, to give latitude of sentiment to their teachers, and members, to think differently upon any part of revealed truth; and so destroy that unity in sentiment, and profession which is the glory of the church of Christ;—if this rage shall tempt men to tolerate opinions and principles, concerning any part of revealed truth, inconsistent with one another;—if this toleration shall coalesce men of jarring sentiments, with regard to many parts of revealed truth, provided they agree upon what you call essentials,—then, Sir, that is the liberty of conscience, the toleration in the church, which I sincerely detest, as subversive of the purity of the gospel, and which, I hope, shall never witness in the Secession!

'But what say you to the Magistrate's authority, to con-

troul the liberties and rights of conscience?"—I would say this; We are sure from the Scriptures that the Magistrate, under the old testament, did controul the liberties of conscience, when its dictates were contrary to God's revealed will: and till you can shew, that God had less concern to protect the rights of conscience then, than he has now, you will find this a considerably knotty and obstinate difficulty, against your scheme.

In conclusion upon this argument, let me suppose you have shewn to a demonstration, that our Confession contains things respecting the Magistrate's power, which the Scriptures do not clearly warrant, the most you can infer from this, is, that an investigation of the point is necessary, so as to have it corrected; but by no means, that forbearance upon that article is the proper remedy. This then is *insufficient* to warrant the alteration.

ARGUMENT

(2.) "I cannot see that the article in question is to us of such importance, as to justify us in making it a term of communion."—Perhaps, Sir, you do not. But you would not have the perfection or defect of your sight the rule of a church's fellowship. Her articles may be very important, although you don't *see* them to be so. Nay granting, for the sake of argument, this article had been as unimportant as you suppose, yet in as much as occasion is apprehended to be taken from hence, to introduce an unscriptural plan of communion, among us, and because the very manner in which you are for dropping this article, would leave an imputation both upon it, and upon the Confession where it remains, it ceases to be the unimportant thing, you alledge. Besides, your own principle of fellowship, page 65. obliges you, to retract this argument. The peace of the church will not only be hurt, but be destroyed, if you press this matter. It of consequence becomes now a most important duty to retain the article, to abandon your measure as altogether inexpedient, if not something worse; and from henceforward, give up the project, of still keeping in view the same object, endeavouring only to change the method of bringing it about. Neither can you blame us for being jealous, considering what hath happened, in ripening this business for its present appearance.

"Is the doctrine of the Magistrate's right, and obligation, to suppress heresy of such importance as to justify us in excluding, or in expelling from the office of minister, or elder, all who cannot cheerfully promise before God, that he will hold it fast to the end, and never prove luke-warm, or indifferent, about it?"—This, Sir, appears to me extremely unfair, and with respect to the credit of our profession, and the genuine principles of your brethren, from whom you differ, a most unhandsome way of stating the question. It is laid in such a manner, as to give the Associated Synod, especially at this time, the most hideous air of intolerance, if it shall refuse the adoption of your forbearance: and your brethren, who are contending for what you are *bound* to maintain, are subjected to the most undeserved obloquy, in the view of readers, who know no more about the true cause of their opposition, than appears from your statement.

The case you know to be this, much better than I can state to you. We assert, that if the doctrine, suppose the Magistrate's power, or any other, you choose to suppose, be of divine authority and clearly taught in our bibles, it is to be held fast by us, as much as any other part of our profession. Neither do we reckon it free of the charge of presumption, to talk of any truth of revelation, as *unimportant*, till it be pronounced unimportant, by God. For his thoughts, especially upon religious matters, are often not as our thoughts. If the article be not in our bible, let this be judicially ascertained, and then you may dismiss it decently. But if it be an article which God hath revealed to our faith, and the church hath attained to the profession of it, why refuse to retain it?

I would therefore ask you in turn, should a candidate either for the ministry, or eldership, acknowledge this article to be a revelation of God, which you know your present reasoning supposes, and yet would declare, that he could not promise, before God, to hold fast that truth to the end, and never prove lukewarm or indifferent about it, would you really, notwithstanding this declaration, admit him? Where, besides, would be your warrant for admitting him? Would not his refusal give just reason to suspect his friendship to truth, in other articles. You allow "that truths are of greater value, beyond all calculation, than the richest possessions." If then God hath revealed any truth for the church to maintain, then a refusal, from a candidate, in

that church, to promise to hold it fast, is certainly a loud call upon her, immediately to stand up in its defence, and allow none of her teachers to cast away what is more 'valuable than the richest possessions.' If he be ignorant of the article, by all means instruct him. If he have scruples, hear them; nor proceed in the exercise of authority, without at the same time, using all due pains to reach conviction. But if, after he is instructed, he shall wilfully refuse to maintain it, against all opposite errors, under the novel whim, that it is not of sufficient importance, to be retained as an article of profession, then, I acknowledge myself so uncharitable as to assert, that he can scarce be allowed to be a *faithful* man, in other things. And it is to faithful men only, the gospel ministry is to be committed. For 'he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much. And he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.'

You say, page 44. "that our Lord sometimes declined, and sometimes expressly prohibited his disciples to publish some of the most important doctrines of religion." And from this you infer, "that although the doctrine concerning the power of the civil Magistrate as defined in our Confession of Faith were incontestible, yet it appears to be a doctrine not necessary nor useful in the present state of the world." A very feeble and inaccurate conclusion from your premises! They were most *important* doctrines which you say our Lord prohibited his disciples to publish; therefore it is a warrant for us also not to publish or profess most *important* doctrines. That is the conclusion if you reason fairly. And as to the article in question not 'appearing necessary nor useful, in the present state of the world,' neither was the ordinance of fasting necessary or useful to the friends of the bridegroom, while the bridegroom was with them, but that was no reason why they should consider fasting as an unimportant article of revelation, because they were not called, to the immediate exercise of the duty. — Our Lord had important reasons, you very properly remark, for declining &c. as for every other part of his conduct. And beyond all doubt he had. But where is the remotest hint that he had the reason you would wish to draw, by way of conclusion, from his conduct? You know very well, that whatever doctrine he thought proper not to have published, he specified that to his disciples; but never

left them to the random of their own conjecture, or the dreams they might form, after amusing themselves, in the 'variety of their speculation,' to suppress the publication of what they pleased. Till, then, you can shew, that the doctrine, about the Magistrate's power, is laid under this prohibition by our Lord, the instance, you here adduce, can, on no account, serve your purpose. Nay, it is all against you. For as it would have been a piece of intolerable presumption, and sinful perversion of our Lord's orders, had any of the disciples adduced his conduct here as a warrant, to drop any doctrine of religion,—to conceal any truth which, to their deluded apprehension, did not appear of any great importance, (indeed the notion never struck them) the crime must be equally great in us, if we shall make a similar attempt.

By the appeal you have made to the late Mr. Brown, page 9. you have pledged yourself to pay much deference to his authority. I shall therefore dismiss this argument, as quite *insufficient* to warrant alteration also, by refreshing your mind, with a few sentences from his Letters on Toleration, shewing the light in which he viewed the conduct you are so zealously urging.

Page 63. "Sir, have you in an honest, and *orderly* manner, renounced these Confessions of Faith, as plainly and publicly as you solemnly avowed, if not also subscribed a steadfast adherance to the Westminster one, at your ordination? Dare you, one day, call God, angels and men to witness, that you sincerely avow that Confession of Faith to be the Confession of your Faith, and that you sincerely believe the WHOLE DOCTRINE contained in it, to be founded on the word of God, and will constantly adhere to, and maintain the same all the days of your life;—and the next slight, reproach, revile and attempt to *confute an important article of it*? Have you suffered as much for a zealous maintainance of the intrinsic power of the church, and of Christ's sole headship over her, as his spiritual kingdom, as the compilers and cordial adherers to that Confession have done? If not, modesty, as well as equity, might have restrained your revilings!——Page 94. Upon the whole, Sir, I readily grant, that a multitude of cavils may be started against the Magistrate's power about religious matters, mentioned in our excellent standards, as may be against every divine truth, the most fundamental not excepted; and the

the proper application of it to practice, may be, in some circumstances, not a little difficult. But not cavils however specious; nor difficulty of upright performance of duty, but *demonstrative arguments of its falseness* will warrant my renouncing a principle, which I have so solemnly espoused, in ordination vows and covenants with God.—Perhaps, Tindal alone hath raised as many shrewd objections against the divine authority of our bible, as have, or can be, raised against that power of Magistrates mentioned in our standards; and yet wo, wo, wo for ever, to my soul, if, on that account, I renounce it as an imposture of Satan!!”

In what light these sentences may appear to your mind, I know not: But to mine, they appear most solemn, and pointed. And with respect to present measures, do they not cut to the quick? Are they not as pointed, as if they had been expressly written by him to his successor in office? I wish, Sir, you had never been embarked, in such a dishonourable, and to me, undutiful undertaking!

ARGUMENT

(3.) “The Synod has already declared their sentiments against the article in question, considered as an article of communion.” Then, Sir, what need of an act of forbearance? If the Synod hath done already all you want, why stir up all this strife about it. As to the act of Presbytery, and our warning against Popery, to which you refer, as your evidence of what you say, I have not them at hand; and therefore cannot examine the justice of your statement. But is it fair, although it were the case, to produce side phrases, out of former deeds, when no judicial declaration was intended to be made, upon that precise point, as an authority for your measure? This can scarce be called specious reasoning, far less solid. But since you admit the authority of deeds, in former times, if you please, I will present you with one or two, more in point than this.—The act of assembly ‘subjecting to severest censure, any who should subscribe the Covenants and then speak against them, or who should speak, *write, print, teach, or preach* any doctrine, tenet or opinion contrary unto any head, *article*, part or proposition of the Confession of Faith of this church!—What do you say to this, Sir? If there be argument in your reference, there is still more here. Recon-

cile your conduct in writing and printing against our Confession, with the Synod's refusal of an investigation of this, and I pledge myself to shew, there is no argument in the argument you here adduce.—What do you next say to the Synod's Appendix in the Act and Testimony, given already in a foot note, in which even yourself, as member of court, condemn, and testify against, the loose and unscriptural principles, which your present Considerations are intended to recommend? I am for the Synod to be consistent: and they can be perfectly consistent with all the sentiments formerly expressed, about the article in question, and yet spout your favourite overture. But, how they can be consistent with former standing acts of the church of Scotland, to which they have professed their adherance, and even with their own Appendix, and yet protect you from censure, is surely a considerably up-hill business!

You tell us that Mr. Walker 'repels, with scorn, from Seceders a charge of compulsory principles in matters of religion, brought against them.' But why not tell us likewise, that he has rescued the Confession, from the charge of containing bloody or persecuting principles? If you acknowledge his authority in the one instance, are you not equally bound to admit it in the other?—Your question, 'Why were not these brethren called to an account for departing from our received principles?' comes with an amazingly good grace from you, Sir!

ARGUMENT

(4.) "The consequences of passing the act or of refusing to pass it. For the power which Christ hath given to his servants, add you, is for edification, and not for destruction. All things must be done by us for the edification of the church, for promoting her peace, liberty and welfare."

Amen, Sir! We unite most cordially upon these sentiments; although in the application of them, we may differ most essentially. From the length of this argument, you surely reckon it a very strong one; and in nothing can your zeal for the overture appear more remarkably, than in the enumeration of dismal consequences you predict, from the rejection of it.

"Principles of liberty, you say, religious and civil, are now universally current among us. Books on these sub-

jects, fall into the hands of our young men in the course of their studies; by which they are taught, that no man has a right to impose his own religion upon other men. The arguments are at least plausible, and insinuating, if not solid. The doctrine fixes itself on their minds, and without doing violence to their own judgements, they will not give their profession of assent to the doctrine, that men who err in their religious opinions are to be proceeded against by the sword of the civil Magistrate. Can you keep such books out of the hands of our young men; or, would you wish to do it? Can you hinder them from adopting notions so plausible, so congenial to the love of liberty?"

Here the truth comes out still more fully. Political notions, connected with very loose and exceptionable sentiments about liberty of conscience, have had too much influence, in exciting dislike at our religious profession, and are here assigned as the true causes of it. Our Professor of Divinity too, being perhaps as much enamoured with these notions as might have been wished, this is not to be supposed to be wholly without its influence, in turning young men's attention as frequently to these books and studies, as is consistent with that application which is necessary, to "consider the great number of articles contained in our Confession, with so close attention, and be so firmly established in the belief of them, as Scriptural truths, as to declare before God their firm belief of them." Impressed with such views as these, respecting the necessity of the closest application to the study of Divinity, in order to a conscientious, and judicious assent to our religious principles, at licence and ordination, might it not have been naturally expected of you as a service of love, as well as of duty, that you would employ both your influence and authority in entreating young men to bestow their undivided attention upon this great object, and not suffer it to be diverted from this, by reading and studying 'those books upon liberty, which may fall into their hands.' It is with great propriety you design the sentiments taught in these books *notions*: as there are many notions afloat at present, respecting liberty, both religious and civil, little corresponding with the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, or conducive to the welfare of civil society; and most undoubtedly, you would not have your divinity-hall to be converted into a nursery of sedition. You tell us that these

notions are 'plausible and insinuating,' and therefore they become the more dangerous, if they be not solid.

Instead then of countenancing such notions, or expressing yourself with such an air of satisfaction in their favour, was it not your duty to warn our youth against such reading, as was inconsistent with our religious profession, and to expose the danger of young men, pointing to the holy ministry, allowing their minds to become inflamed, with political speculations? By the same accident, books, upon liberty of will, and upon the sufficiency of human reason, may fall into the hands of young men! 'The arguments are at least plausible and insinuating. Can you keep such books out of their hands; or would you wish to do it?' Thus except you were at more care, to fortify the minds of young men against the errors and evil tendency of these, than you have been, in pointing out the dangerous extremes, to which the other have, or may be carried, the Secession might soon be overrun with men of Arminian and Socinian blasphemies. Infer not from hence, that I am inimical to real liberty. Let it be of the rational and scriptural kind, and I wish to be as zealous for it as duty requires. I have however no scruple to say, that there are principles of liberty very current among us at present, altogether inconsistent with the word of God, and being calculated, to make us fall out with our religious profession, ought carefully to be avoided by us. Especially as in the present rage, there is such eminent danger of men's shaping their religious creed, by their notions of liberty, rather than regulating their ideas of liberty, by the word of truth. And how far the Considerations, I am at present examining, favour such evils, the reader is left to judge for himself.

Is it fair to employ such smooth and flattering language in speaking about the love of liberty, and the doctrine in its favour fixing upon young men's minds; and, in the same sentences, to use such harsh and violent language, in speaking of the magistrate's exercise of his power? Men who err in religious opinion are to be immediately proceeded against, according to your statement, by the sword of the civil magistrate! But you know very well, that upon the principles of those who give the amplest power to the civil magistrate respecting religion, it is only after every other mean hath been used, to convince the mind, and

persuade the erroneous, of the evil tendency of their errors; it is only after all pains and patience have been used, both by ministers, and magistrates, to induce them to renounce their errors; it is only after the person persists in contempt of all means, and becomes obstinate, that stronger measures are to be used. But for the least mistake, or difference in religious opinion, you represent the Magistrate as instantly proceeding to dispatch the transgressor. Why such attempts to asperse your brethren, and to render the doctrine in our Confession odious? The same God who hath invested Magistrates with their power, hath prescribed the crimes they are to punish, with the degree of punishment according to the crime; and wherein the law of God is not explicit, for their direction, let them incline in the exercise of power to the merciful side.

‘No man, it is readily granted, has a right to *impose* his own religion upon other men.’ But if church officers in the exercise of their powers from Christ find men under their inspection, avowing religious opinions contrary to the profession of the church, they have a right surely to oblige them either to retract these opinions, or to expel them from their communion, if after every means used to reclaim them they shall continue obstinate. ‘And that is not imposing their religion on other men.’ But is not this encroaching upon the rights of conscience just as much, as when the Magistrate, in aid of the church’s authority, shall employ his power in discouraging and marking out those as unprofitable members of society, whom God in his word condemns for maintaining errors, and opinions, dangerous to the souls of men?

As to your question, ‘Would you wish to keep such books out of the hands of young men?’ You know better than I can tell you, that by a deed of Synod, ministers in general, and our Professor of Divinity no doubt in particular, have it in charge, to inform themselves of the books our students read; with a view to direct their studies into such a channel, as shall establish their minds, and give them just views, of evangelical truth.

Where then would have been the impropriety, or inconsistency of our Professor, or any other of us, cautioning young men against reading Tom Paine’s Rights of Man, and against the adoption of his notions about liberty, because they are plausible; especially if these be contrary

to our religious profession, and they will have one day to declare that to be the profession of their faith? And here, Sir, I would appeal to yourself, which would have been the wisest, most prudent, and honourable method; whether to have endeavoured in the manner stated above, to have prevented the confusion we experience from the dislike, which these plausible notions about liberty have excited at our religious profession, respecting the magistrate?—or to allow these notions to operate their effect, and then come to the Synod, and to the Secession at large, and tell them what has happened; demanding, them at the same time, to alter their formula according to the taste and humour of the times, because the train of reading, which, our Professor of Divinity, in his ardent love of liberty, hath encouraged our young men to pursue, renders this necessary?

The Synod, by your own confession, hath made such declarations respecting enforcing religious duties by civil pains as clearly demonstrate, that as a body they never approved of any such principle. If young men after this still entertain obstinate scruples against the Confession, and you persuade them they would be very unconscientious, if they did not, who I beseech you is to blame? Have you not by the hard things you have said against the Confession and Covenants, both ‘laid and left needless obstructions in the way of young men, and therefore are accountable before God, for the mischief that may be the consequence?’ Exceedingly strong language I grant you, but it is your own! And if you be hurt at the application of it to yourself, only think, how those, equally undeserving at the very least, must feel, for whom it was originally intended.

The solemnity of language you use here is an evidence that you are much in earnest. But does that charity, which you so warmly recommend, warrant you to assert your zeal, and express your fervent concern for the souls of men, at the expence of your brethren? “For a world, you exclaim, I would not be the guilty cause of withholding bread from one ready to perish with hunger; for ten worlds, I would not be the cause of withholding the bread of life, from thousands of perishing souls.”—But we, who resist your overture, must be the guilty cause of withholding the bread of life, which you would so generously bestow! No, Sir; no! We repel the charge with indignant regret, that you, or any of your brethren, should insinuate the remotest

suspicion, that in resisting the change you meditate we are not suitably zealous for the salvation of men. Since you compel us to recommend ourselves, we say, that we will not yield to you either in zeal, or conscientious tenderness for the souls of men. Nay, it is because we are animated with a jealous dread lest souls be endangered, by the introduction of erroneous teachers into our fellowship, through your scheme of alteration, that we strenuously resist it.

“ You will admit those who can bend their consciences into a compliance with what appears convenience or necessity; but you exclude those who are too honest to swear any thing which they cannot swear without clear convictions of duty.”—The first part of this sentence is a very tremendous charge indeed. Those who have taken the formula without any objection to the doctrine of our Confession respecting the Magistrate’s power in religion, are men ‘ who have bended their consciences into a compliance with what appears convenience or necessity.’ And such unprincipled men must those of all other denominations be, who declare their belief of the whole doctrine of our Confession at ordination, as well as we do. Or, if you restrict your accusation only to such young men as have not made any objections to the formula, as it stands, how uncharitable to represent them as stifling the convictions of conscience, from convenience or necessity, because they express no scruples! And ‘ we will admit those.’ We will connive with men of such plaint and accommodating consciences! Another amiable feature of your Christian charity, when we are the objects of it! And indeed, you are so very liberal in your bestowal of it upon disciples who are up to your own views, that you have little to spare for us. These ‘ are too honest to swear any thing which they cannot swear without clear convictions of duty.’ And we exclude them! What base truckling kind of characters must you conceive us to be! Very different from those upright spirits of the age, who in adopting ‘ notions so plausible, so congenial to the love of liberty’ have become so very *honest*, that, at all events, they must have the religious principles of this part of the church modelled according to these notions! and scruple not at the most violent measures in order to accomplish their ends! Had you said they were too honest, to disturb us in our profession, but peaceably left us, to connect with others more conformable to their views, I would

have understood you better. For 'while that maxim stands recorded in Scripture, that evil must not be done that good may come,' none ought one day to profess before God and men our religious principles to be theirs, and vow at ordination to support these; and the next, take part with those who would overturn them. 'Can it be expected, that such young men should come into the ministry with divine approbation, and with the fulness of the blessings of the gospel of Christ?'

Your story of the minister in the days of Protestant persecution is well calculated to prepossess the minds of young men against the article; and raise scruples and difficulties in those, who otherwise might have had none. If the Professor view the case in this light, who has had so long time to study it, it must certainly be very dangerous for us to acquiesce in it.

"The case of brethren already in communion with us, presses, you think, still more immediately on our attention. —A necessity is laid upon them, from their desire of being approved of Christ at his appearance, honestly to declare their sentiments, let the consequence be what it will. When they declare their sentiments, you must expel them from your body." —By this, Sir, you have surely decided your own fate, and perhaps more severely than your brethren of persecuting principles would have done. In a variety of instances, you have declared sentiments the very reverse of what 'we profess, as a religious body. You have been abundantly sensible of this at the time you were composing these Considerations. 'That maxim still stands recorded in Scripture evil must not be done that good may come.' Why then shut up your brethren in the Synod to such an hard dilemma; either to *expel you from their body*; or to expose their character to the world, for want of consistency, and of impartiality, according to the view of discipline you have just now given, even for all the good of serving your cause by 'declaring your sentiments?'. And this hath become the more glaring, as an investigation of your pamphlet was demanded of the Synod, and they refused. —As to the 'necessity laid upon brethren to declare their sentiments, let the consequence be what it will,' after the solemn manner you have stated it, I am bound to believe them much in earnest. But their case hath two sides and two necessities it seems, and you have given us only one of them. Necessity is laid upon them by a most solemn vow, 'as they shall be approved

by *Christ at his appearing*, neither directly nor indirectly to attempt the changes they meditate. Necessity was laid upon them also not to declare the sentiments to which you allude; far less to take such undue methods of propagating them: and I cannot help 'honestly declaring my sentiment' here in turn, that at the bar of the Judge this will be found the *strongest necessity* of the two. What a pity, these brethren were not constrained by their necessity sooner! or been able at least to contain themselves a little longer; till, in a more calm and undisturbed state of society, the matter underwent a deliberate discussion, and perhaps they might have been brought to views more consistent with the simplicity of the gospel; and their first necessity and *expulsion* would have been prevented.

"This, you add, is unavoidable; if the articles in question are not to be made matters of forbearance. And for what do you expel them? for 'being of the same principles with yourselves. For you have already declared, even as a court, your disavowal of compulsory measures in religion.'" I have neither desire nor intention to misrepresent you in any thing. After then the concession you have here made, how can one suppress his astonishment, that we should have heard such an outcry about the persecuting principles of Seceders! That we should have been troubled with a petition to our Synod, for 'necessary reform,' and told by you, that without this, 'useful members will be expelled the body; and the door shut upon useful members that may enter.'* And all this, although as 'a court we have already declared our disavowal of compulsory measures in religion.' You acknowledge there is no difference of principle among us; and in proof of it, quote the decision of our supreme court. What more then would you have? It is surely competent for a court, to explain the sense in which they understand any expression in any of their standard books. And is not that explanation the light, in which the article is ever after to be viewed? You say such an explanation hath been given. You seem pleased with it. You refer to it in proof of what you say. Why then continue dissatisfied? What would you more? Why press forbearance, when by your own acknowledgement we are agreed?

* Of consequence, those attached to what we profess, and whom you and your brethren are driving so forcibly from our communion, must be considered by you as *useless* members.

Why all this trouble to the Synod, and exposure of ourselves to the world, 'doting about questions and strifes of words, when there is no difference about doctrine expressed by them?' Where then can be the need of reform, when you acknowledge the necessary reform already made?— Ah, Sir! your darling idol '*freedom of enquiry*,' and '*liberty of conscience*,' must be carried into the house of the Lord, and forbearance must stalk before, to make way for its admittance! else we should never have heard so much about the power ascribed to the magistrate in our Confession, nor, since you acknowledge us agreed, would it have been such a difficult matter to settle the difference.

Upon this article you have employed much solemnity of language, and made such allusions as must operate very powerfully upon a serious mind, who views the matter in the light of your statement. Neither are these, who cannot accede to your plan, much indebted to you for any great excess of charity and moderation; in the opinion you form of them, or of their conduct. "They are men of blood!" page 52. "They do what lies in their power to deprive others of the means of living usefully to the church, and of distributing the bread of life to hundreds of souls! They do what in them lies to inflict an ecclesiastical death upon a considerable number of brethren, whom they love, and whom they highly esteem, for no other reason but their aversion to compulsory measures in religion!" Page 55.—In one point of view, I feel no uneasiness at such comparisons, because conscious of having done nothing to deserve them. But in another, I confess myself much hurt in seeing a pamphlet coming abroad in such an unconstitutional manner to the world, from our Professor of Divinity, and holding up, in such an hideous light, the conduct of brethren, who wish to be as tender, and zealous of precious and immortal souls, as its author can be.

You ought to recollect, Sir. that we are far from arrogating to ourselves the *exclusive* privilege of preaching the gospel to our fellow men. Others do this as well as we, with whom, on other accounts, we cannot walk in fellowship. Your strong and solemn language, about depriving hundreds of the bread of life, cannot therefore apply. We have told the world our views about bloody principles and compulsory measures already, and spurn the accusation. As to your scheme of forbearance, it is at once an unscriptural

innovation, and no remedy to the evil. If then, either those that are not of us, or those in our connection, declare after all they are not satisfied, without the adoption of forbearance, as a remedy, we tell them we are extremely sorry for it: but cannot acquiesce. But surely in all this we offer violence to no man. We do not injure a single soul; although we say we are resolved to abide by our profession, notwithstanding the strong language, and hard speeches of Mr. Lawfon, who is undoubtedly the official guardian of what we are defending, till '*legal evidence*' be adduced that we are wrong.

You say, page 59. 'that we ought to avoid not only all evil, but all appearance of evil; and to cut off all occasion from them that wish to reproach us.'—And so we should. Your Considerations of consequence should never have seen the light; and replies to them would have been prevented. Only such as are friendly to our profession ought to have taken part of this ministry with us; and the violent measures in train to change it upon us, should never have been attempted. But how can forbearance upon the point in question cut off occasion to reproach us? Will it not rather give occasion. 'These men, might the world say, have discovered very little zeal for the truth indeed! They affected to find great fault with the Confession, and Covenants. But instead of ascertaining what is wrong in these articles, and so guarding their people against the error, they have agreed to become more jarring in their sentiments than ever. By introducing a principle of toleration of opposition of sentiment, and doctrine, among their teachers, they must in the event create much perplexity, and distress of mind, to the Christian people; and tempt them to imagine, there is no difference between truth, and error; and that the man incurs no blame, who thinks contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghost, in certain doctrines in his word, any more than the man, who thinks according unto it?'

Upon the whole, Sir, when I read the ten pages you have written on this argument; when I meet with your protestation against withholding the bread of life from thousands of perishing souls; when I come to the hard necessity, in which you represent brethren, who have declared their sentiments against our Confession, respecting compulsory measures; and consider the comparison you draw between these, and the persecuting mother of abominations, I feel

exceedingly shocked indeed at such a view of matters, and wish to examine evidence again, lest we be indulging in a mistake.—But upon turning up the Confession itself, and taking things as there recorded; upon comparing one part with another, and recollecting particularly the defences in its favour, and the light in which the matter hath been all along viewed by the Secession, all these unfavourable impressions are entirely removed. Your argument appears altogether *insufficient*; and after your declaring us agreed, according to *your* act of the supreme court, disavowing compulsory measures, am exceedingly amazed, you should still urge so many odious things, to increase any reader's disgust, both against us as a body, and against our Confession. The adherence to the Confession, without any exception, professed by us at ordination, is the same that hath been professed, as far as I know, by every denomination of Presbyterians in Scotland; till the late political fermentation began to operate, and therefore, why hold up the Magistrate's power about religion as a point of such singularity in our profession?

Your last ARGUMENT is drawn from the prayers we offer up, 'that the breaches among the lovers of the name and gospel of Christ may be healed.' And here you talk about 'dealing falsely with God, unless we use all means competent to us for obtaining those blessings for which we make request.'—Certainly, Sir, we would be dealing very falsely; nay, our conduct would amount to an insult of the most high God, if we should pray for these blessings, and take steps for bringing them about, which himself hath not prescribed in his word. So *incompetent* is forbearance to effect this, that it appears to some, as opposite to the method God hath laid down in his word, as the two poles. The point, about which you are contending here, is no article that divides any Presbyterian denominations among us. Independents have long had the sentiments about the Magistrate's power you patronize: but with regard to Presbyterians, they have never separated from one another upon this point. It is therefore a very curious argument in favour of forbearance, to propose the *union* of Christians, by means of it, in a point, upon which they have never as yet *separated*. With regard to an union with Independents, you say church government ought to be a term of communion; and therefore while that is maintained, your for-

bearance could not unite them with you either. A certain denomination indeed calling themselves Presbyterians, but who profess to hold communion with all the lovers of Christ, hath sparred considerably with Seceders an account of their persecuting principles too: but even them, your forbearance cannot unite, any more than Independents, as long as the form of church government is no article of communion with them. Your argument here, however, serves one purpose, and that is, to prove, that your forbearance is nothing more than an opening to other alterations, besides those which have, as yet, been brought into view.

“ If we sincerely wish for a coalition, you say, among the various parties of Christians that appear to entertain a sincere regard to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we ought willingly to submit our received notions to an examination, in points wherein they differ from us.” And who ever refused this? We are persuaded it is because people have not sufficiently examined the causes of the secession, and the true principles Seceders profess; but suffer themselves to be imposed on, by every malicious calumny which its enemies have ever been so industrious to propagate against it, that such stupid prejudices are entertained at Seceders. And beyond all doubt, were people more under the influence of zeal for truth, and less actuated by pride, by passion, and by prejudice, there would be fewer divisions by far in the Christian church. But because others are displeased at you for the testimony you bear as a distinct body against their departure from the simplicity of the gospel, would you, on that account, fall from your profession, and unite with them, while they adhere as tenaciously to the evils against which you have testified, as ever?—Then why not join Rowland Hill, and his friends in Edinburgh and elsewhere, in their UNION CHURCH? For except in talking a little more loosely about *modes and forms* than you have done, I humbly apprehend there is little difference between you, as to the principles of union. How then can you, or any of your friends, take offence at your people for favouring the views of these men, by resorting to hear them, and giving them in other respects their countenance? You yourselves have set them the example, by proclaiming a disavowal of these very articles, in your own profession, which have ever been peculiarly offensive to

many of them; and the applause, bestowed upon you, from that quarter, for what you have said about the Magistrate's power and the obligation of our Covenants, is a proof, to me at least, where they think you are verging; and of this others are not without their fears.

Whenever our God pours down his Spirit in order to effect such a very joyful, and most desirable event, as an union among the friends of truth, I firmly believe it will be accomplished, by a very different method, than the toleration of diversity of principle, and opinion, about any part of his revealed will. We are expressly told, that "when the Lord shall bring again Zion, her watchmen shall see eye to eye:" and then the consequence, "they shall lift up the voice, with the voice *together* shall they sing." This, I humbly apprehend, is an incomparably better principle of union, than your forbearance. Each party shall then have their eyes opened, to see, and their hearts brought, to confess, and renounce, their respective errors. Being made to see eye to eye respecting the various truths of God, this harmony in sentiment will produce and cherish harmony in affection: and then an union at once scriptural, glorifying to God, satisfying to all concerned, and eminently edifying and lasting, will be the consequence. In order to all this, it is necessary to hold the truth, and renounce no part of it, till it be proved to be wrong: to endeavour as much as possible, to maintain unity in sentiment, concerning the various truths of God, especially among ourselves, who profess to walk together in the same church order; and make every exertion for extending the knowledge of every truth which God hath revealed to us in the Scriptures, and we profess to maintain.

If I dare venture a declaration of the wishes of my own heart, in this great concern, I am verily in good earnest in my prayers for the union of the friends of truth. Most gladly would I rejoice in such a desirable union: and contribute any small endeavour in my power towards it, in consistency with what appears to me the path of duty. But in the present state of matters, were all denominations to make the experiment of coming together, upon the principle of mutual forbearance, respecting all things in which they have hitherto differed, except you brought them to unite better in their views, the experiment would tend little to the satisfaction, edification, and comfort of any of the

parties, and still less to the interests of religion. We may talk about being united as we please, while each retains his own views, he could not divest himself of a separate interest either. And whatever noise some make about their liberality, I find those who make the highest pretensions to it, and who have most to say against the bigotry of others, more unreasonably tenacious of their loose peculiarities, than any bigot, to whom the term bigotry is most *liberally* applied. Neither harmony, nor genuine affection, which is so essentially necessary for walking together in Christian fellowship, would be cultivated. Coldness would at length burst out, into such feuds and animosities, as would terminate in separations, perhaps more disagreeable, and dishonourable to religion, than the first. And most undoubtedly, whatever you assert to the contrary, an union, upon the principle of forbearance among the different denominations, would be a renunciation of all the articles of truth wherein you at present differ from them; and, with a bad grace, you could ever after assert them.

“ But say you did the apostle Paul renounce the doctrine that the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down by Christ, and that the enmity even the law of commandments contained in ordinances was abolished in his cross, when he communicated with the believing Jews who were of a different judgement?” This you call a plain example, and with it you mean to put to silence, the lying, or erring lips, of such as view the abettors of your scheme as apostatizing from the truth.—But stop a little, Sir! Let us have a fair state of the case; and perhaps it will not appear so very plain, nor so favourable for your purpose, as you suppose. Neither will it silence the lips, you call *lying* and *erring*, which charge your scheme with apostacy, so readily as you think. Paul came to a part of the Christian church, which had received very unfavourable reports concerning him. They believed them to be true; and were so much prejudiced against him, that his usefulness was lost them, till these prejudices were removed, by his conforming to the rites of Moses still in use at Jerusalem, while he continued there. The true state of the case seems to be precisely this. Since the decree of Jerusalem, the Gentiles were exempted from conforming to the Jewish rites. The believing Jews knew, and were

satisfied with this; * so far were they from '*being of a different judgement*, as you assert, from Paul, respecting the great principle of Christian liberty among the Gentiles.' They, on the other hand, still conformed to the rites of Moses; because the Holy Ghost had never declared it to be unlawful in them to do so. The acknowledged rule with regard to both was this; the Gentiles were not obliged to conform, nor the Jews to renounce, these rites. The charge accordingly against Paul was, that, in opposition to this acknowledged order in the church, wherever he went, 'he taught all the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.'† In order therefore to contradict this malicious representation, Paul became as a Jew, to the Jew; and in doing so, he acted in perfect conformity to the principle of union, and fellowship, then in practice in the Christian church. Upon the same principle, he circumcised Timothy, and shaved his head at Cenchrea, because he had a vow.

This being the case, and I appeal to the history in Acts xxi. 20,—40. in proof of it, how, I beseech you, does this silence *any lip*, upon the matter at issue with us? His communicating with the church as a Jew, was perfectly conformable to the acknowledged practice of the church; and no more than a proof, that he was not the disorderly person, his enemies represented him to be. On the contrary, when he ministered among the Gentiles, he as strenuously asserted their liberty, from all such observances. In all this, he exemplified the most perfect conformity, to the acknowledged laws of the church.

Mr. Lawson of Selkirk, on the contrary, hath troubled the church to which he belongs, and disturbed her peace, by introducing *real* innovations of a most serious nature in their tendency, and by asserting many strange things never before heard by her. He hath offended many of the people of God, and grieved several of his brethren by the unfair attack he hath made upon their profession, although he had no such commandment, nor warrant, so to do. '*What is it then?*' Since Mr. Lawson hath adduced his own example, it is to be hoped, he will have both the good sense, and religion, to take it. Paul was at pains, and expences, to *satisfy* his brethren the Jews, he was not

* Act. xv. 22.

† Act. xxi. 21.

the disorderly person, he had been reported to be. So must you, Sir, be at all pains to satisfy those in your present connection, that you are a more consistent, and orderly Seceder, than your Considerations represent you to be. After Paul's example, it is incumbent upon you to disavow every thing, contrary to the acknowledged doctrine, and order of the church to which you belong; and give assurance of your readiness to conform, in all things, to her doctrine, fellowship, and formula.——'But in these things the Secession is wrong, and I want to put her right.'—So you say! But you ought not to have gone wrong yourself, in such a praise-worthy attempt. 'We are not to do evil that good may come,' is a maxim still in the Scriptures; and 'you ought to give no occasion to them that seek occasion.' You ought, besides, to have given your proof positive from the word of God, we were wrong, else you should not have said it.

You ask, page 65, 'Did the apostles of our Lord make the liberty wherewith Christ maketh his people free a term of communion to the believing Jews?' If, by the liberty wherewith Christ maketh his people free, you mean the abolition of the rites of Moses as far as respected them, I answer, No: and for the best of reasons, because they had no such warrant. Exemption from the observance of these rites properly respected the Gentiles. But with regard to the believing Jews, their Master had given them no such orders.

'Did they betray that precious doctrine, you add, by the indulgence which they gave to these erring Christians?' I answer, they had no indulgence to give, because Christ never ordered the Jews to renounce all observance of their rites. Of consequence they were not such *erring* Christians as you would insinuate.—The truth of the case seems to be this:—The law, injoining the observance of these things, was no longer in force, as by the incarnation and cross of Christ the end of it was fully answered. Still, however, it was never declared unlawful for a Jew to observe his accustomed rites. He might do in that according as his own convictions, and the edification of his fellow Christians might require. The Gentiles, by the decree of Jerusalem, were exempted from any conformity to Jewish rites, except in the cases specified in that decree, to please the offended Jews.—I don't know what you mean by 'ri-

gorous terms of communion.' The terms of that time were all things that Christ commanded; and in the present instance, the Gentiles had to abstain from 'meats offered to idols, from blood, and from things strangled,' to please their Jewish brethren. But not the slenderest shadow of forbearance in your use of the term in all this, although you seem much inclined to hold up this as a pretty direct proof. Very unfortunately for your scheme, however, every thing is specified, and fixed. The Jew cannot impose his rites upon the Gentile. Nor the Gentile look down upon the Jew, in as much as in certain articles he was to conform to Jewish observances. But, Sir, with regard to our very dishonourable struggle, have you ever proved the articles in dispute to be of the very same nature with the rites of Moses, and to be abrogated by the death of Christ? Have you ever reasoned from the word of God, like the apostles at Jerusalem, to fix and define some specific deliverance, for the consolation of which the church might rejoice? Nay, even although you had proved these articles to belong to the ceremonies of Moses, which will perhaps require all the penetration, which our modern *new light* possesses, to effect, still the example of the apostles makes every thing against you. For like them respecting blood and things strangled, to please those in the Secession, who cannot see the matter as you do, you are bound to retain these articles as they are.

Such is the regard these primitive office-bearers had to the uniformity of the church, in her profession, that even ceremonies, although acknowledged to be abrogated, were retained as terms of fellowship, when the peace and harmony of the church of God required it. Let us suppose then, which I by no means grant, that the power of the civil magistrate about religion, and the obligation of our Covenants upon posterity, were of the very same nature with things strangled, and blood, yet for the peace, and harmony of the Secession, you ought to retain them as formerly, out of respect, and love, to your brethren, who can by no means see it their duty to acquiesce in alteration. This is perfectly agreeable to the instance yourself hath adduced; and therefore you will bow, it is hoped, to the authority to which you have made the appeal, in imitation of 'such meekness of wisdom.'

Thus upon a survey of your five arguments, for the

changes intended to be introduced, by the adoption of the Committee's overture of forbearance, I for one assure you, that instead of any conviction, I am more confirmed in my judgement against your scheme than ever. It appears to me neither rational nor scriptural; and with regard to its tendency, corruption in doctrine with all its correspondent evils will be the consequence. Thus a most excellent cause, by which unity and purity, in the system of revealed religion, have been maintained for upwards of sixty years among us, will in the issue be lost. And whenever it shall happen, that a corrupted and erroneous priesthood shall make their appearance in the Secession, our churches ought instantly to be shut, since the design of their erection will be defeated; and people, not aware of the change, in resorting thither in quest of the bread of life, be poisoned with the grapes of Sodom, and the clusters of Gomorrah. Neither, Sir, am I singular in my apprehensions respecting the purity of doctrine in our body. Brethren, of different views upon the present question, are united in very serious alarms, with regard to the introduction of another gospel among us, than the gospel of Jesus Christ; and are verily persuaded that something decisive ought immediately to be done, to prevent such an alarming evil: only, among other bad effects of these unpleasant disputes, differences here are likely to enervate exertion, and suspend co-operation, till the season be lost. And perhaps had the same zeal, and labour, you have employed about the magistrate's power, and the obligation of our covenants, been spent in impressing the minds of our youth for the ministry, with a lively sense of the magnitude of their work; with the indispensable necessity of experimental godliness in their own souls, to fit them for it; and with the sacred obligations upon them, in their 'doctrine to shew uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned,' they might have served a far more valuable purpose. And there is the more need for all of us, as far as we have opportunity, to use every endeavour, to satisfy ourselves, that all our youth be sound in the faith in its various articles; and that their method of preaching be of the kind, that is best calculated to inform the understanding, to affect and awaken the conscience, to comfort the hearts of the godly, and in all their distresses and duties to lead them to Jesus Christ the way, the truth, and the

life; lest, during the present commotion, false brethren should be unawares brought in, to corrupt the doctrine, and so become the guilty cause, of withholding wholesome and savory food from thousands of perishing souls, and we be the guilty cause of introducing them to such a station.

That we may be directed and helped of God "to commit the things which we have received among many witnesses, to faithful men who shall be able to teach them to others also," is the earnest desire of,

Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

REVEREND SIR,

BREACH of Covenant must surely be a very heinous crime, in the estimation of Jehovah, when, according to the Scriptures, he so uniformly pursues that sin, with the most marked tokens of his hot displeasure. For breach of covenant he threatens Israel to 'appoint over them terror and consumption, and the burning ague that shall consume the eye, and cause sorrow of heart.---He will bring a sword upon them, that will avenge the quarrel of his covenant†.' For breach of the Gibeonites covenant, so late as in the days of Saul, seven of his posterity were punished with death; even although as many objections might be made to that transaction, as can be offered against our National Covenant, and against our Solemn League and Covenant‡. For breach of Covenant by Zedekiah, by his princes, and the people of Judah, in the days of Jeremiah, this is the denunciation, 'I will give the men which have transgressed my Covenant---the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem,---and all the people,---I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life; and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth§.' For Zedekiah's breach of Covenant with the king of Babylon, who at that time had him his captive, and would dictate to him many, if not all, the conditions of it;

† Lev. xxvi. 15, 16, 25. ‡ Josh. iii. 2 Sam. xxi. 1,---10.
§ Jer. xxxiv. 17,---22.

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these are the words from the Lord: "Shall he prosper? Shall he escape that doth such things? Or shall he break the covenant and be delivered?---Thus saith the Lord God, as I live surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, *even it* will I recompense upon his own head. And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare; and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there, for his trespass which he trespassed against me *." Add to all this the words of Moses to Israel, a little before his death. Deut. xxix. 24, 25. "Even all the nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger?---Then men shall say, because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers."

These and such like statements, from the word of God, have taken a very firm hold of my mind. We see from hence, that even many improprieties and faults in framing agreements by covenant in which God is called, either as a witness, or party, or both, do not invalidate its obligation. The great object of our National Covenant and of the Solemn League and Covenant, being to secure our religious and civil liberties, against all the attempts of adversaries to subvert them, and to secure their preservation to the latest posterity, why should advocates for liberty have so much to say against them? They are an engagement by the Covenanters in their own, and in the name of their posterity, to maintain our holy religion in all points as these are expressed in our Confession and Catechisms, with the government, worship, and discipline, of the church, in opposition to all errors. Even allowing all the faults which objectors may alledge against the manner of entering into these Covenants to be true; granting that very strong and improper methods were taken to procure a more universal assent to them, while the articles, which by these Covenants, we become bound to maintain, are the truths of God, we cannot be relieved from these obligations. By our formula, every intrant into the ministry, eldership, and deaconship, recognises these obligations as binding up-

* Ezek. xvii, 11—22.

on himself, and the belief of their obligation upon posterity, as part of his profession. We may therefore struggle to burst these bands asunder, till we die, while God considers them as binding, not a knot of them will be loosed. The Associated Synod may go the length of expunging the article from our formula. Foolish young men may even venture to say very unadvised things against them. Nay, supposing the very mention of them were even exploded from our society, their obligation will be as firm in God's account as ever; and all our attempts to burst through them, will only expose ourselves the more, to these threatened judgments which he executes with such severity, upon Covenant-breakers.

Till, therefore, men unfriendly to these engagements can demonstrate what article of truth, or what point of morality, is injured by acknowledging their perpetual obligation, or by retaining the magistrate's power as it is expressed in our Confession, why expose ourselves to such a tremendous risk, by attempting change? To reject them, in our circumstances, is to run every risk. To retain them, and the questions as they were, concerning them, the inconveniency of scrupling brethren excepted, is to run none. Our Covenants will never bind us to retain any error. and upon such a discovery, let it be corrected. But why any man, who is pleased with our Confession and form of church government as an ordinance of Christ, and considers it as his duty to defend these against all opposite errors, should find difficulty to acknowledge the obligation of our Covenants upon posterity, and to require such an acknowledgement of others, is perhaps not very easy to conceive. If, however, he be dissatisfied with these, if he want a change, and particularly with to form religious connections with these, whose tenets are condemned by our Confession, and Covenants, he is compelled, in point of consistency, to make every effort, to shake himself loose of such engagements. This, perhaps, may account for a great deal of the demur which hath risen of late, about our acknowledging the perpetual obligation of our Covenants upon posterity, or about our retaining this question in our formula.--Loyalty to the king, too, with a very particular engagement to maintain kingly government, in opposition

to republican principles, is also very explicitly recognised in our Covenants, as the framers of them were abused by their adversaries for disloyalty. Whether the political contentions of the times may have created a dislike at them in the minds of any, on this account, I shall leave to others to determine. But whatever be the motive to be relieved from these obligations, such are our peculiar circumstances, that attempts to change, except these be very clearly demonstrated from the word of God to be express duty, must be extremely dangerous and difficult, when so many strong holds and securities must be broken through to effect it.

You have bestowed a few pages upon our Covenants, the tendency of which seems rather to raise doubts in the mind concerning them, to excite prejudices, and give consequence to objections, which enemies from the very beginning have started to them, than to give any light on the subject*. Long ago fatigued in following you through

* I beg leave to transcribe a sentence or two from the late Principal Robertson's History of Scotland, in which he expresses far more honourable sentiments both of these transactions, and of the men who were engaged in them, than you have done.

"When roused by any extraordinary event, or alarmed by any public danger, the people of Israel were accustomed to bind themselves by a solemn Covenant, to adhere to that religion, which the Almighty had established among them; this the Scots considered as a sacred precedent which it became them to imitate.—Almost all the Popish princes were then joined in a league for extirpating the reformed religion, and nothing could be more natural, or seem more efficacious, than to enter into a counter-association, in order to oppose the progress of that formidable conspiracy. To these causes did the Covenant which is become so famous in history, owe its origin.—At the juncture, in which it was first introduced, we may pronounce it to have been a prudent and laudable device for the defence of the religion and liberties of the nation; nor were the terms in which it was conceived, other than might have been expected from men alarmed with the impending danger of Popery, and threatened with an invasion by the most bigotted, and most powerful prince in Europe." Thus far that sensible and elegant writer. You however speak in a very different style concerning our Covenants, and take occasion, from the attempts of designing men to render them subservient to their political purposes, to excite the prejudices of the present generation against them. I am sincerely sorry that in this attempt you are in such company.—All who opposed these transactions, so remarkably countenanced of God, at the time they happened,—Independents from that period to this,—The zealous promoters of the UNION CHURCH at present, with Mr. Kolland Hill in the rear, bawling out these obnoxious terms, "extirpate, suppress, and overcome, Prelacy, Heresy, Schism," &c.

such a variety of sentiment, novel, and, as appears to me, unscriptural, I mean not to remark upon all your doubts and objections; especially as replies to most, if not all, of them, have long ago been made with much better knowledge of the argument, than I dare pretend to profess.--- In reply to your reasoning in pages 67, 68. I refer to Remarks upon Objection 2. You say, once and again, respecting the obligation of our Covenants on posterity, that the dispute is only about words. Some 'have different views from their brethren of the meaning of certain expressions.' ---Why then doat so much about words, as to excite alarm in the minds of many, and convulse our body by urging an alteration concerning words? Mind your own Remark, 'according to Paul's doctrine, those who waste their time and their temper in strife of words, are proud, ignorant, and *delirious*.' If ideas concerning the obligation of our Covenants upon posterity be the same, only the words are different, surely then the words in the formula, so long sanctioned by practice, are entitled to the preference; especially as the peace and edification of our Community require such a continuance. This is no more than what, upon your own principle, and concession, ought to take place. Any thing else will be 'doating about words.'

As to what you say again, about their being unnecessary to be retained as terms of communion, this has been answered already. Even although they were mere ceremonies, which they are not, but granting for the sake of argument, they were as little binding upon us as the Sinai Covenant, yet if the peace of the church require their continuance, if many in your communion will be stumbled to

&c. as his strong objections against the profession of a part of the church, which he seems by no means to understand, are your trusty and well-beloved friends in this business. And indeed so fierce is Mr. Hill for moderation, that he will allow very little quarter to any, but those who are just as loose about what he calls 'forms and modes,' &c. as himself. And is it not pretty remarkable, that the very expedient, which was experienced by our forefathers as so efficacious for securing and promoting the cause of civil and religious liberty, should be regarded by their posterity as such an impediment in their way of enjoying it? A sufficient reason, it is humbly presumed, for all to investigate matters a little more maturely, lest the liberty, that sets them and us at such variance, should be found in the issue, not to be of the right kind!

such a degree, that they cannot hold Communion with you, if you shall press such a measure, does not this call in the loudest manner, upon *strong* brethren to testify at least thus far their love to those who are weaker, as to desist from their attempts of alteration for their sake. To display their strength, by casting them out from among us, as an effectual method against any farther trouble with them, is but a coarse prescription, ill comporting with the meekness and gentleness of him 'who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax,' and insufferable in men so loud in their claims upon moderation.

You think that most of the arguments which have been used in defence of the overture, respecting the magistrates power, will apply to the Covenants: Then the answers, if there has been any weight in them, will apply in like manner.—It is pleasant to be assured by your authority, that brethren on both sides are 'equally zealous for our covenanted reformation,' page 69. If so then why scruple at the obligation of the these Covenants upon posterity, which were intended to strengthen and inspire mutual zeal? And indeed decency, and duty, and a becoming care to have their scruples respected, require every scrupler to speak and act with the greatest tenderness and respect for these engagements, lest he be harder bound by them than he imagines. For who could respect the difficulties of that man, about the obligation of these Covenants, who having acknowledged it with all the solemnity of an oath, and upon this declaration had obtained a charge, was inrolled in our courts, and received by the right hand of fellowship as a brother, if he should afterwards revile such transactions, make them the subject of his jest, and laugh at those who could not join him in his mirth? Would you not reckon such a character more fit to be subjected to the severest censures as a prophane fool, than to have a Synod gravely to deliberate, how to relieve him from what he would call scruples? I should tremble at the thoughts of men of this description getting in unawares among us: who hostile to these transactions, name and thing, exert themselves to the utmost to bring the patriotism, zeal and magnanimity of our godly ancestors into disgrace, in order to propagate the errors which they resisted even unto blood. Lest any

such character get in among us, I trust you will agree with me, that more than ordinary vigilance should be used by all of us at this time: For I am much afraid Sir, your considerations, and our present disputes, will be viewed by many, as giving no small countenance and consequence to such adversaries.

I beg leave to remark upon another consideration in this page. No terms of Communion in the Christian church ought to depend on any other authority but that of the New Testament, which no where declares, that our public Covenants ever existed." On this account you think it questionable whether an acknowledgement of the obligation of these on us should be a term of Communion.—I wish an undue fondness to confine researches of Christians to the New Testament, in all their Ideas of doctrine, worship, government, and discipline, has not made you forget yourself a little here. Was not the decree of the Synod of Jerusalem a term of Communion? And if you look into the debate upon that occasion, you will find the authority of the Old Testament directing their decision. By your own acknowledgement, 'things strangled, and blood, were prohibited the Gentiles for the Jews sake, and the peace of the church.' It was undoubtedly upon the authority of the Old Testament, that these observances were ever terms in the church of God. And was it not out of the respect which Christians still had for these Old Testament observances, that they were continued, by the decision of the Apostles? Besides, if "all scripture be given by inspiration of God; if whatsoever was written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope;" I would wish to see some better authority than your own, to establish the maxim you have here laid down, respecting terms of Communion in the *New Testament church*.

These Covenants you will grant, were taken in express imitation of scriptural example; and as the Scriptures of the old and New Testament contain one complete rule of faith and manners, if the doctrine be fully established in the old testament, the faith and practice of new testament believers are to be directed by it. 'till then you can prove that all examples of Jewish covenanting were done away by the death of Christ, your conclusion is surely too

fast. The old testament was the source from whence the apostles drew all their arguments, in reasoning with the Jews concerning Jesus of Nazereth as the true Messiah. To these, they constantly made their appeal; they directed the faith of their hearers to the authority of God displayed in them; and upon the declaration of the peoples faith in the true Messiah, and in salvation through his name, according to the Scriptures then in use, they were admitted. Thus this term of Communion, and perhaps the most of them in use at the beginning, in the Christian Church, depended upon the authority of the Holy Ghost speaking in the *Old Testament*. Had then the circumstances of the church required such an association as that of our covenanting fathers, beyond all peradventure, the example of the saints in Old Testament times would have been their directory in this. And for good reason, because it was their common practice to make their appeal to Old Testament Scripture in all their enquiries, and in every difficult step they had to take.

You express in general a great respect for these Covenant transactions. It was quite unnecessary then, and not altogether consistent with your ordinary avowal, to express yourself with a kind of air of taunt, in the conclusion which you draw. 'The New Testament no where declares that these Covenants ever existed.' And how could it, when they were made and sworn about fifteen or sixteen hundred years after the New Testament was written? But neither did the New Testament declare that our Confession of Faith ever existed, or any of the formulas and tests of orthodoxy in use in the church as terms of fellowship in succeeding ages. What then will you make of these? By all means cast them away upon your principles, since 'the New Testament no where declares that they ever existed!' At any rate, our Confession must be purged of all the proofs taken from the Old Testament, in support of its various articles, if a profession of adherence to it shall be a term of communion in future; as 'no term of communion in the Christian church ought to depend on any other authority, but that of the New Testament.' What need to beware of your new doctrines when we see where they will land us? Hark you, Sir! Don't you take parents bound in baptism to keep up the worship of God in their fami-

Yes, evening and morning, by singing his praise, by reading his word, and calling upon his name by prayer? Is not this a term of communion? Perhaps, however, if the observance of this duty depend upon no other authority than that of the New Testament, it may puzzle you exceedingly, to find that part of family devotion existing in the New Testament in as obvious terms, as to satisfy a plain Christian parent that indeed it is there. But with the help of the Old, both he and you may get out of the difficulty. Nay infant baptism, and parents engagements in the baptism of their children, are greatly indebted to the same authority.

These things being so, then an answer may be more easily given to what you say page 70. that "it is a point cannot be discussed from Scripture whether these Covenants were sworn with such circumstances as to make them a national deed, and therefore it can make no part of the faith of Christians. What is not found in the law and the testimony is not an article of Christian communion imposed by Christ." This hath much of the appearance of a logical quibble. We in the Secession are by far too late in starting such a difficulty. For from the beginning, the Secession church is stated upon the principles of the church of Scotland, and the Covenants by which our ancestors swore to these principles were recognised as ours. Of consequence whoever shall become a Seceder, and become bound at ordination to maintain, and teach the principles professed by Seceders, is, in virtue of this church relation, under the same obligation to maintain these as our ancestors. Difficulties of consequence about their being a national deed cannot in the smallest degree affect their obligation upon us. And as to 'a discussion of this point from Scripture,' in the nature of things it was impossible for the men even of the generation in which these Covenants were made, to discuss from Scripture, that they were sworn with such circumstances as to make them a national deed. This must have rested upon the testimony either of their senses or of credible witnesses. The second or third generation, by studying the Covenants themselves, with the records of the church or state or both concerning them, could obtain all the evidence, which the nature of the case could admit, that these were religious deeds gone into, by parents in name of children; by church rulers, for the church under

their inspection; by princes and nobles and representatives, for those nations they represented. This could not be learned from the bible, except the part of the bible recording it had been written at the time, or since these events happened, or they had been the subject of a prophecy. But these were sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind that such a relation subsisted as that which hath just now been stated: and after that, you may call the Covenants then sworn a national deed, or any thing else you please, the relation, and the obligation by them, will perhaps be a very difficult matter for you to cast off.

As to the point of their being a national deed, or the Covenants themselves, if you will, '*not being found in the law and the prophets, and of consequence not being a term of communion imposed by Christ*,'—The same argument will equally serve the purpose of one, who would reject a profession of adherence to our Confession as a term of communion, or a profession of adherence to the principles of Seceders, in opposition to the errors against which they have born testimony. Neither of these is in the law and the testimony! But, Sir, if the law and the testimony contain examples of such transactions, and we be expressly commanded of God to vow and pay: if the spirit of prophecy shall declare of new testament times, that the friends of God shall say, '*Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten*:' if our forefathers after these examples, encouraged by such promises, and in obedience to such commands, entered into these engagements both for themselves and us, the authority from the Scripture is not so very obscure on this point as some would insinuate. As then we learn from the '*law and the testimony*' that he that vows either in his own person or in his ancestors must pay, the present article is perhaps not so foreign from a term of Christian communion, in the circumstances of the church of Christ in this land, and imposed by his authority, as you would have us believe.

You say, page 73. your brethren '*dare not come under an oath, unless, in their own view, as well as in other men's view, the words of it express the sentiments of their minds*.' Our answer is the same. We are satisfied with the manner in which the question in our formula is expressed; but have strong objections to your alteration, and the form of expression you are for substituting. If therefore these bre-

then labour under such difficulties respecting the mode of expression presently in use, we cannot relieve them, for we labour under the same, with regard to their's. In these circumstances, who, upon your own principles of liberty, should give way to his brother? The one who is satisfied with what he has sworn to maintain, till he be convinced of the error, and who is resolved to maintain it. Or the other who, without any compulsion, took the same oath, but instead of maintaining the article, says he has scruples about the expressions of it, and must have a change? Nay, if his brother consent not to the change, he will *compel* him, or cut him off!

You will surely allow us to have consciences as well as you. Although the oath both of us have taken to 'assert, maintain, and defend' our present principles according to the formula holds not your consciences, yet it holds our's. Nor can we, in consistency with our convictions of our vow, yield to your demand. Would you use compulsory measures in this case, when compulsory measures are the very occasion of all your difficulties?

As to civil pains and penalties which are urged as such a strong objection against these Covenants, and upon which you have said several things, I am sorry to add, indecently strong, it is pretty generally agreed I believe, that they were enacted in *terrorem*, or to keep the enemies of these Covenants in awe, rather than from any disposition in these men to put them in execution. And after all, it will perhaps be difficult to adduce instances, of these penal statutes being ever put in execution, except against persons engaged in traitorous plots against the state, as well as most avowed enemies, to the progress of reformation in the church. Neither are we bound to follow up these penal statutes, giving it even your own way, except we were placed precisely in their circumstances, and exposed to their jeopardies. And were it so, from the very strong measures you have taken already, in point of church censure, I have every reason to conclude that even those, whose expressions against civil pains and penalties in religion, have been most violent, would not be altogether averse to the use of them, if their own personal safety were at stake! It is one thing for us, reclining at our ease, and perhaps waxing wanton, in the enjoyment of those very privileges which these noble patriots

purchased for us, at the price of their blood, to speculate upon their conduct, and reprobate with an indecent severity some of their measures; and to stand in their place, and make experiment of our new speculations, about liberty of conscience, and the rights of man.

These, Sir, are remarks which have occurred to me, in the perusal of your Considerations. I should have been extremely glad you had seen it your duty, to have manifested such a respect for Scriptural order, and regard for the peace and edification of that part of the church, where you have so long enjoyed so many privileges, and spent your years and labour, with much good, I hope, to the souls of men, as never to have commenced author in the business. It would have prevented replies, which many of your sentiments have rendered so necessary. It would have suppressed a great deal of strife. It would have prevented an exposure of measures, little to the credit of religion. And should you and your brethren persist in your plan, in opposition to all that hath been said, the controversy and the exposure you may assure yourself is as yet scarce begun. I wish only to be understood, but to draw a veil at present over the rest. The 'harsh imputations' too, which you seem to preface, page 77, would also have been avoided. Nor would occasion have been given to us to complain, perhaps with more truth, of similar treatment. Had you allowed a discussion when we pled for it, perhaps some edifying explanation might have settled all differences. That season however is unfortunately lost. The present ferment, and jealousy, and strife, totally unqualify us for the grave and dispassionate discussion which the case requires. Any thing from one side will meet with opposition from the other, as all attempts toward an accommodation have hitherto shewn.—But were the affair dismissed from among us as if it never had been; were our minds allowed to cool upon the subject; were time allowed to deliberate upon the nature, and to avert to the hurtful tendency, of the new scheme of fellowship of which you are so fond at present, I doubt not but you, and others, will change your views, and God by his Spirit may direct us to such a deliverance, as shall unite, and edify all concerned. This I call an EFFECTUAL REMEDY to our present disputes, if you and your brethren would only be induced to take it. Nay I beg

leave to add, it is the only one.* Push your measures, and a division is unavoidable. Dismiss the cause of contention, and contention will cease. Push your measures, and you render not a few of your brethren a stumbling-block, and an offence, to their people; you destroy their usefulness unto them. You rent sessions; you rent congregations; you rent families; you give occasion to every degree of defamation, misrepresentation, and detraction; while on-lookers on all sides either grieve at such an unseemly sight, if religious; or if profane, laugh at your folly, and condemn your rashness, for the sake of mere scruples, to create such mischief.

To this measure I can perceive only one objection, but am afraid, some will consider it as a very strong one; and that is, that brethren have declared their views so fully on the disputed points, that they cannot well, in consistency with their declarations, consent that the matter be dismissed, without obtaining some change. That I acknowledge to be a considerable embarrassment, and am sorry for the brethren who have stepped so much out of order, as to declare themselves unfriendly to any articles of our fellowship, and at the same time occupy the place of judges to press a change. Being parties so deeply interested in such a great question, the station of petitioners, not judges, was the one which a free and *uninfluenced* discussion of the case required.—After all, could any thing in consistency with our profession, have been adopted to relieve brethren from such inconveniency, I for one, would, for their sakes, sincerely have wished it. But that at present seems impracticable. And granting it be both embarrassing and unpleasant unto them, they will no doubt have the religion and good sense of taking every thing into the account, and of two evils, submitting to the least. Let them place their individual and personal inconveniencies on the one side, and the immensely greater public calamity of rending, not for the present only, but for generations after, such a prospering part of the church of Christ on the other. Let them recollect besides, that all their difficulties, according to their own acknowledgement, amount only to *scruples* about

* Should the wonderful and occult art of *polishing 'stones into mirrors'* be employed, in converting this remedy into a drug of some opposite quality, it is to be hoped the reader will have more good sense than be imposed on by such low quackery; nor display such want of understanding, as to reckon the ridiculous tricks of the mountebank, dressed up in a fool's coat, a sufficient argument for recommending his powders and plaisters.

the importance of these things, which they become bound to maintain; but as our late worthy Professor well observes, nothing but what is found *absolutely sinful* can warrant a change, in our circumstances. Let them remember also, that we, on the contrary, are constrained not merely by scruples, but by positive duty, in consequence of the oath by which both of us are bound, to maintain our present profession till, by a clear manifestation of the truth, it be found to be wrong. And they will certainly allow positive duty to have the preference to mere scruples, and cheerfully acquiesce in those things that make for peace, by abandoning all attempts to change.

You have set your argument for change in the very strongest light which it will bear; and perhaps you will be as little disposed to give up your point as any; but every thing you have said proceeds upon the principle, that these articles are not of sufficient importance for being terms of fellowship. But then you have acknowledged, * that what is conducive to the peace of the church ought to be a term of communion; and therefore to be consistent with yourself, you are obliged to acquiesce. Nay more, other brethren, who have taken a sufficiently active part in pressing this business, have declared, that these articles, as they at present stand, do not aggrieve their minds; only they were desirous of relief to their brethren. But have not circumstances occurred, much more than to counterbalance such a desire, laudable as it is to indulge brotherly love, if that can be gratified in consistency with duty? They would not surely cut off one brother, to ease another. They would not mar their own usefulness, and destroy their own comfort and respectability, both with their own people, and others; nor would they violate the moderation which they profess, merely for the sake of *trifles* which they have declared these things all along to be. Besides, if a general union be your object, you defeat the very purpose of your exertions, if you shall press your plan of union with such violence, as to render a separation among your present connections unavoidable. For by your own acknowledgment, if you shall separate, you 'cut yourself off from every body of Presbyterians in the kingdom.' With whom then would you form your union? If not with Presbyterians, then with Independents, with Anabaptists, and other

denominations, whose principles, according to your present profession, are far more different from yours, than those of your brethren, with whom you think you differ most in this business.

Nay more, why so reluctant to retain the formula, and dismiss all disputes about it? We hear a talk with some, about *returning*. But pray how far have they to return? Let them not depart farther than our formula, which they are bound to maintain, will allow, and their return will be but a very easy journey. The preamble prefixed to it, by way of explanation, did not please you, nor a great many more. You dissented from it. The formula of consequence is to you whatever it was. And who would be so very uncandid, as to grasp at the circumstance of our yielding to make that trial, as a plea against retaining things as they are; when you yourselves were not pleased with the trial proposed? You are bound too, in point of candour and brotherhood, in your turn to relieve our difficulties, when we yielded so far to yours; nor can we yield any farther according to our present light. Your dissatisfaction, and the dissatisfaction of others, defeated the object of union intended by the preamble. Nor can you refuse, that every stretch was made, to accommodate the difficulties of brethren upon that occasion. Although some were decidedly of opinion, that to retain the formula, without any preamble, was both the speediest, and the surest method of restoring peace; yet if all would unite upon it, and no attempts be made to explain away the common sense of its language, we were willing to acquiesce: because not a iota of our principles was by that explanation given up. But whenever the consequences of your dissent became obvious; whenever it appeared, that occasion might be taken from that explanation, to propagate opinions, and carry on measures, still according to the original intention, I for one wished it abandoned, on account of such abuses. This much I beg leave to state in my own vindication, against any imputation of inconsistency, which I know have been made to me and others, because we consented to the preamble, and afterwards have urged the necessity of giving it up.

Anxious for the restoration of peace, and the preservation of unity in our connection, I humbly beseech fathers and brethren, to indulge me with the liberty of intreating and expostulating with them, in this public manner, as they

would regard the credit of religion, at this very alarming period; as they would tender the peace, and edification of this part of the church; as they would remove stumbling-blocks out of the way, both of the people, and of office-bearers; as you would extinguish those blazing fire-brands of animosity and strife, by which we are in such danger of being consumed one of another, to drop these measures, to dismiss the business as if it had never been; and, neither directly nor indirectly, attempt the subversion of the religious principles, and fellowship, we enjoy, till it can be shewn, to the conviction of all concerned, wherein our present errors consist. I know there are not a few of us, far from being keen in this business; only not aware of the consequences, have hitherto gone along. Matters however now coming to such a issue, it is firmly hoped such brethren will see things now in a different light; and exert themselves to prevent farther evils as they have it perhaps much in their power, to do it.

With regard to you, Sir, conscious that you are far better qualified to give me counsel, than I to employ intreaty with you, I am ashamed to use it; and yet cannot help testifying at least good will to prevent farther strife, by using the most fervent intreaty, that at the approaching meeting of Synod, you would totally abandon all farther attempts, for the present, to change. Let the preamble be dismissed; and such declaration made by the Synod as shall restore confidence between all the ministers in the Secession and their people; that henceforth, as brethren in the same fellowship, and ministry, we may 'follow the things that make for peace, and whereby one may edify another.'

But if you are resolved to persevere, I feel it my duty, since we in the ministry are by no means the only parties concerned, to turn to the eldership and deaconship in our communion, as well as to the Christian people, and to urge my request with them, after assuring you, that I am with every degree of respect, and regard, for you and your best interests,

Reverend Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

Buxton, 22d May, 1799.

WM. TAYLOR.

ADDRESS

TO THE

ELDERSHIP. AND DEACONSHIP.

BRETHREN,

THE same formula put to us at ordination is put to you. The same obligations by which we are bound to 'assert, maintain, and defend' the truths we profess, are laid upon you. How then can alterations, either in justice or consistency, be made to ease our minds who are ministers, till you be fully satisfied as to the propriety of them; and be ascertained from the holy Scriptures, that you are warranted by your ordination vows, to give your concurrence to such a measure? No man will suppose, that you are to be compelled to suppress either your convictions, or your zeal, in defence of our doctrine and fellowship, which you were sworn before God, and the world, to maintain. You have had the opportunity of reading our Professor's Considerations, for, I believe, they were very extensively circulated. You must now judge for yourselves the justice of these remarks upon them. The most favourable interpretation which can be put upon them seems to be this: So very loose is his language, in several parts, that it will admit of meanings and consequences, which, perhaps, he never intended. But even with this charitable allowance, is there not enough remaining to satisfy you, that, instead of the *little trifling alteration* about the magistrate's power in our Confession, and about civil pains and punishments in our Covenants, the measure of change proposed and urged by him, draws exceedingly deep, and involves in it consequences, which are not generally perceived?---That it will operate in the issue a compleat change in our articles of fellowship, introduce an opposition of doctrine among our public

instructors, and open a door for the propagation of error? Should you either be satisfied that any or all of these consequences natively follow, or have even fears concerning them, does it not then become a most serious question, how far you can be accessary, by your silence, or by your concurrence, to such changes in a profession, which you have sworn to maintain? At any rate, is it not at best but a very doubtful experiment, although all concerned had gone into it? And surely after five years hot contention about it, it is five years too long, since it ought to have been laid aside; and we allowed to enjoy peace and tranquillity, by retaining our profession, and the formula as it was. It cannot be deemed out of order to address you among the rest in this particular manner. It is on behalf of what we are mutually pledged to support, to the utmost of our power: and with an incomparably better grace, and far more justice, may we call upon one another for mutual assistance, than any can call you off, to act an opposite part. Permit me then to entreat you, to exert yourselves in your station, by petition, by remonstrance, or by whatever other method you can employ your influence in consistency with integrity, and good order, to prevent those evils, by resisting the present attempts to change, by soliciting an immediate dismissal of the cause of our present contentions; and who knows, whether you are come to your office, for such a service as this, as a means of restoring us to our former happy circumstances?

Peace calls upon you for this. If, by petition, remonstrance, or any other proper mode of intreaty, you can be the instruments of restoring this blessing to the association, will not the blessing of peace-makers descend upon you?

Truth solicits such a service from you. You perceive what freedoms have already been used with the truths we have hitherto professed, since this contention began, and how many notions have been recommended by all the influence of our Professor of Divinity, totally inconsistent with the scriptural plan of fellowship, we have hitherto enjoyed. If then you would contribute your endeavours to maintain truth and unity among us, as far as a firm stand for what we presently enjoy can be instrumental of this, let me beseech you, with spirit and unanimity to stand forth upon the present occasion.

The *Credit of Religion* calls upon you. Can any thing

be a greater reproach to religion, or strengthen more effectually the cause of its enemies, especially of the infidel world, than the contentions and strifes of its professed friends. And could ever a time have been worse chosen than the present, when the most strenuous exertions are making, to sap the very foundations of our faith and hope, to introduce a discussion like this, to distract and divide the friends of religion, when the common cause so loudly calls for union and co-operation? Exert yourselves then, to the utmost, to rescue religion from this reproach, and the Secession from the odium, which contention and division must inevitably draw down upon it. Were our late worthy Professor to lift up his head from the grave, and look around our synod, both to those whom he trained up for the ministry, and those who have succeeded, the present struggles about change, in those very points which he hath so ably defended, would give occasion for that remark in his Address to Students of Divinity, still more than any one thing that had taken place, when he wrote it. "The Secession, although it be, on many accounts the cause of God, hath been shamefully injured, by those who have espoused it." What need then for every one to contribute their endeavour to wipe away this reproach, and if possible recover our respectability by preventing division, and preserving the religious principles we profess. Add to this, that the prosperity, and edification of *succeeding generations*, call upon you in the loudest manner. A most dreadful woe will be to us! if we have enjoyed privileges, and religious principles which cost our fathers so dear, and in adhering to which, purity hath been so long preserved among us, but from an inclination to change, and rage for toleration which the Scriptures of truth do not warrant, we shall either adopt measures, or acquiesce in the adoption of them, that shall involve generations to come, in licentiousness, confusion, and error!!!

If error be in our religious profession, far be it from us to plead for retaining it. Let regular and constitutional means be taken to convince us of such error, and wisdom and prudence be exercised both as to the time, and manner of making such investigation, and we desire to be as zealous to have it corrected as our brethren. But let us not be deceived by mere assertion, or general rumour, or suspicion without proof: and till the proof can with edification be

taken, let us retain our formula as it was.—In asking this, particularly with the view of restoring peace to our body, you ask what the Synod can by no means refuse, either in point of equity, or in consistency with the principle of liberty so greatly in vogue at present. In point of equity they cannot refuse to retain what they vowed to maintain, and exacted of you the very same engagement. And with regard to consistency, if they be not for compulsory measures themselves, they cannot surely *compel* us contrary to our express duty, to renounce our profession to them. Let me beseech you particularly, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, to keep united in your affections and exertions, and, in the spirit of meekness, take every constitutional and regular method of accomplishing your object. “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies; be ye like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

TO THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

YOU too, Brethren, are greatly interested in our present measures. When we were ordained among you, as a test of our orthodoxy, friendship, and zeal for the various articles professed by this part of the church, we declared both our belief of, and adherence unto them. Upon this condition, you took us for your ministers, and promised us all subjection in the Lord; we on the other hand, accepting the charge of your souls, with *the express obligation*, of teaching you all these articles, we had thus openly professed, as our own belief.

I beg leave to call your attention very particularly to this consideration. None of us then, under pain of censure, and then of deposition if persisted in, dare teach you any thing, but what this part of the church of Christ hath publicly adopted, as the system of revealed truth for the salvation of men. We have bound ourselves by an oath to conform in *all things* to the church's profession, and to propagate it with fidelity and zeal. Should therefore any preacher, or minister, entertain his hearers with any peculiar notions of his own, or of any other whom he adopts,

instead of training them up in the profession of this part of the church, and which he had declared to be the profession of his faith, must he not prove himself both a most disorderly man, and a man of no conscience of his oath, in thus bursting asunder the most obvious bonds of all scriptural church order? In respect of such disorders, you my brethren are the proper guardians of our profession, as it is only in your hearing they are committed; and to you it belongs, by complaints, regularly presented to Sessions, or Presbyteries, to crave a redress of grievances before their proper courts. I wish to be perfectly understood here. It is far from my wish to cherish a spirit of discontent and grumbling among any people, where there is no cause; or of private murmuring against preachers and ministers, without taking the regular steps of obtaining redress. For it is no more than fair, for such as think they have cause to complain, to give the object of the complaint an opportunity of vindicating himself; and this too is the only proper method of removing stumbling-blocks out of the way of Christian edification. But where there is sufficient cause for such complaints, the Christian people are undutiful to their profession, undutiful to the church, undutiful to the teacher, undutiful to the courts, undutiful to their own conscience; but above all undutiful to our God and Redeemer, to hear error taught, and not take the regular steps to have the teacher of it reclaimed; but continue to murmur in private on account of it, and yet allow the evil to go on. Thus, a great bulwark to the truth is intrusted to your keeping who are the Christian people; and if you neglect to defend it, you will be the very first to suffer by the neglect.

In our present disputes, your edification, your comfort, and your respectability as part of that religious body to which you belong are all most deeply involved. Matters have now come to the crisis, when you must either acquiesce in the changes proposed, and hazard all the consequences; or stand up in opposition to such measures, and be the instruments of preserving unity in our body, and that consistency of profession we have hitherto maintained. It is your inviolable privilege, by petition, by complaint, by remonstrance, to let your sentiments be known to the supreme court, and at this time such an intimation becomes absolutely necessary. Your religious principles have friends not a few in the courts, but these friends need

your co-operation. I doubt not but the friends of change will be much offended at the liberty of address here used; but upon what principle of equity can they? For if attempts have been used, by some addressing you in public, and others dealing with you in private, to remove you from your steadfastness, much more becoming and equitable is it, that we call upon you to maintain it, and advise you to the regular means of succeeding. Upon your united co-operation and zeal, every thing, under God, depends. For when our voice, and our intreaties would be disregarded, the language of firmness on your part, of attachment to the truths you profess, and of your resolution to persist in avowing this attachment, will most assuredly obtain the deference and respect which are necessary, both to preserve our religious principles till any part of them be shewn to be contrary to God's revealed will, and to prevent division. Division among the professed friends of Christ is a most grievous calamity; and to you we look as the great mean in the hand of God to prevent it. Be either indifferent in this affair, or strengthen the hands of such as are bent on change, and division is unavoidable. Be united in craving the formula to be retained, and all contentions about it to cease; and division will be prevented.

Let compassion for brethren who have already been driven from the Secession; because they cannot acquiesce in change:—Compassion for many ministers, elders, and deacons, whom the pressing of present changes will compel to follow:—Compassion for congregations which are in danger of being torn to pieces:—Compassion for ministers, and other office-bearers, as well as private Christians, whose minds are greatly aggrieved by present measures, but from an horror at farther divisions, are in the greatest perplexity as to the path of duty;—Compassion for our bleeding character as a religious body;—Nay more, let compassion for both sides, who if their minds were only allowed to cool might be better united in our views, than may at present be suspected;—but above all, compassion for a profane and infidel world, who become hardened in a very eminent degree by such strifes and contentions among the friends of religion—rouse all of you to make every regular effort in your power, to have the cause of our contention instantly removed. Let not the present period of the Secession be disgraced by the cutting off of any in her community whe-

ther office-bearers or others for steadfastness to what we profess. Their restoration, who are thus cut off, is surely a most desirable object. Neither it is presumed can any be indifferent to their suffering condition.

Many in the Secession not interesting themselves at all in the present controversy, and many going readily into present measures, because not aware of their evil tendency, these circumstances have greatly emboldened brethren in their proceedings of late, in order to crush all opposition unto, and afford every indulgence and protection to the favourers of, their new scheme. The present solicitations are designed to apprize you of such things, and to call your attention to our real condition, lest by seeming to concur now, you hasten calamities which it is in your power at present to prevent, but allow this season to pass, and am greatly afraid, you will have cause severely to regret neglecting such a momentuous opportunity, when you cannot recal it. Of these things I beg leave to warn you. Deeply impressed with the evil tendency of present changes, I conceive it to be duty to impart my impressions to my brethren of the same fellowship; and after trying every regular method in my power as an individual to prevent them, should they take place, I hope I am blameless. This I take to be my duty. It is now left with you to consult what is yours.

Guard particularly against your own spirits. Keep united as congregations. Avoid going into factions. Draw not opposite to one another. Nor fly off in detached parties, when every thing does not happen according to your wishes. This both injures your cause, and weakens the hands both of yourselves and others. Ponder well the path of your feet; so as neither to take such steps, nor to utter such language as to afford occasion to those moderate men, who are so full at present of the lopping system, to cut you off!

Should it unfortunately happen that your minister, or any of your elders, or deacons, or members, are of contrary views, know that as long as you take regular steps in declaring your sentiments, they have no right to oppose you, to discourage you, to thwart you in your attempts, nor to talk disrespectfully either of you, or of your measures. Nay considering the indulgence they themselves have experienced, such a conduct would be most ungenerous, and totally inconsistent with those pretensions to candour, and moderation, and free enquiry, which they have for a while past

been making. By these professions they have pledged themselves to protect your rights as sacred, and instead of discouragement, ought to encourage you in the regular steps, by which your complaints or petitions may be heard. Nay they ought to co-operate with you also in being as active in circulating defenses of what you profess, as they have been in spreading opposite publications, that in *free enquiry* none may be at a loss to obtain a view of both sides.

In fine, brethren, lose this opportunity, and such a favourable one to retain your profession and prevent division may never after be enjoyed by you. A general and united application, however, from the body of the Secession will infallibly succeed. The measure may be counted strong by some, but it is necessary; nor is it by any means so strong as those taken already by the other side, even to the cutting off of some, because they will not submit to changes till they see them to be right.—Inform yourselves particularly of the regular order by which petitions are transmitted to the Synod, and be especially accurate in adhering to every point of form. Let your petitions be expressed with mildness and due respect to the courts: nor perhaps is it necessary to introduce any discussion in defence of the articles we profess. They are in our standards as they are, and it is time enough to defend them, when they are brought to a regular trial. Should any of your petitions meet with a refusal of transmission, if informal, study to get it speedily corrected; if after this it be refused, although an hardship to you, you will be obliged to carry it up by protest.

“Finally, brethren, farewell! Be perfect: be of good comfort, be of *one mind*, live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

THE END.



